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The Golden Years

A Story of the Holy Family

by a

Wife, Mother, and Apostle of
Christian Charity

and

Joseph Husslein, S.J., Ph.D.
Co-Author and Editor



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Dedicated to
The most Holy Spirit
Giver of Knowledge
Understanding and
Wisdom
Source of Love and Light
Spouse Divine of
Mary Immaculate
Who Brought into the World
Christ the Lord
“Son of the Carpenter”
Fashioner of the Universe

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FOREWORD

IT IS now many years since the original document on which this book is based came unexpectedly into my possession. Its literary beauty fascinated me no less than the devotional atmosphere which breathed through it.

Its writer, a woman of social standing in the world, had pictured for herself the successive events in the Hidden Life of Christ, set against their constantly varied background: the Judean hills, the sands of the desert, the City of the Sun, the waters of the Nile, the temple at Jerusalem, or the little, lilac-embowered cottage in the village of Nazareth. And so, entering into the lives of the three hallowed persons of that Earthly Trinity, she took note of their every word and action, their thoughts and sentiments and emotions, and recorded for us her impressions.

Above all, as a Christian wife and mother, it was her peculiar gift and privilege to penetrate most deeply into the ineffable intimacies between Mary and her Divine Child, and to describe no less truly, with a woman's intuition, the tender and beautiful relations that existed between the Mother of God and him who was given her as virginal spouse and protector.

On the literary side, the writer enjoyed, in girlhood days, the advantage of a home that has left in American literature an honored name, while she herself possessed what might seem an inherited skill with the pen. But duties of motherhood in a family richly blessed with

children and the distressing cry of charity work to which she could not be deaf, calling on her "from the four quarters of the big town, through all the days of the year," left her little leisure to exercise this gift.

Here, in part at least, is found the reason for the title of "Co-author" that must be assumed by the present writer.

The original document was written not as a book but as a spiritual journal, at the urging of a friend, in the hope that it "might help a little in a corner of the vineyard." It was unbroken as yet by any divisions or chapter headings, but merely with each day's brief and fervid writing duly dated.

Though I had never met the author, the treasure remained precious to me for its own worth, authentic literature as it was.

To evolve, therefore, a book out of the often incomplete writings, never reread by the author; to fill out extensive vacancies left in the narrative; above all, to carry through the work in the style and spirit of the original, and to preserve in every detail the inspiration derived from it—such was the task I had set for myself.

The book, therefore, is strictly a co-operative work. Some chapters are of necessity my own. Yet every effort was made to preserve throughout that refinement of style and buoyancy of spirit which marked the original. After repeated efforts, it has finally been made into one complete and unified work.

Tolle, lege!—"Take and read!"

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THE INCARNATION

THE music of the throbbing stars lay hushed in the midnight sky. Angels leaned from the expectant Heavens and the Just looked out from their holy prison with bated sighs for the dawn of liberation which trembled upon Mary's lips.

The Will of God waited upon the will of His Creature, with love alone to plead His cause.

"Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women," had been the angelic salutation to Mary.

Her soul was troubled at the words, too deep for her to fathom, and she wondered in silent awe at the meaning of this message.

"Fear not, Mary," the angel said, "for thou hast found grace with God. Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David His father; and He shall reign in the house of Jacob forever. And of His kingdom there shall be no end."

And Mary said to the angel: "How shall this be done, because I know not man?"

Here is the first recorded sentence from the lips of

Mary. Remarkably enough, it is a solemn affirmation of her purpose of perpetual virginity. To render this possible Joseph's consent was necessary. So, at the very opening of these wonderful events, the Spouse of Mary appears, in an unseen but intimate connection with the mystery of the Incarnation.

The angel answering said to Mary: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born in thee shall be called the Son of God."

Then, to the magnificent declaration of God's will in her regard, dependent only on Mary's acceptance, the messenger from Heaven's Court added a special sign in confirmation of his words — the conception, namely, of a son by Elizabeth in her old age: "Because no word shall be impossible with God."¹

To Mary's soul, as now she stood in the presence of her mighty destiny, dependent only on her free choice, the vision of its earthly tragedy no less than of its transcendent joys unfolded itself before her. "The burden of Duma calleth to me out of Seir: 'Watchman, what of the night?'"²

What of the night?

The delight of holding the Divine Babe to her breast was to be clouded by Mary's foreknowledge of dark events which the Prophets had so vividly foretold. Into this we may well believe God had given her special insight, in view of the very choice before which Mary stood. But the burden of her sublime vocation called to her in the strong appeal of humanity, and more impera-

¹ Luke 1:28-37.

² Is. 21:11.

tive than all things else, she knew it to be the Will of God. Hesitation for her was out of question. To her lips leaped the inevitable words:

"Behold the handmaid of the Lord; *be it done to me according to thy word.*"³

In that moment Heaven descended to earth; the Creator became incarnate in His creature. Within that virgin womb of Mary, at the coming of the Holy Spirit, under the overshadowing of the Most High, by the co-operation of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in the unity of the ineffable Godhead, the Word was made flesh.

Prostrate and in silence, the angel worshipped the Incarnate Word, two natures in one Divine Person, enshrined in the immaculate womb of the Mother of God. Fulfilled was the yearning of all the ages, answered were the prayers of the patriarchs and prophets.

"And the Word was made flesh."

Transcendently beautiful as was the soul of Mary from the first instant of her Immaculate Conception, the ascensions of her spirit henceforth were to be even more unspeakably wonderful with the actual realization of her vocation to Divine Motherhood.

As a duty and high responsibility, with consequences that even she could not yet fully measure, the little maid of Nazareth had submitted herself unreservedly, with all the power of her being, to the high Will of God. In that act she accepted her own part in the entire redemptive plan of God.

With the dawn, therefore, of that new-born day, the soul of Mary spread its spotless wings and began its loftiest flights to the dazzling empyrean of the spiritual life. "Then shalt thou be delighted in the Lord, and I will lift thee up above the high places of the earth."⁴ God

³ Luke 1:38.

⁴ Is. 58:14.

alone and His Christ were now exalted above her. Heavenward was the Father's face, on the supreme glory of which Mary satiated the cravings of her soul. About her was the love of the Holy Spirit, whose mighty wings enfolded her. Within her, remote from the turmoil of the world, lay the thrilling silence of the Word made flesh, lapping her heart in the peace which passeth all understanding.

But neither was Mary blind to the material works of God's creation. These no one ever saw, or apprehended, or loved just as Mary did. She contemplated them not only with the unveiled purity of her own eyes, but with a reflex of the vision of Christ. Wherever her eyes rested: "Behold, the glory of the Lord stood there . . . and I fell upon my face."⁵ Her soul was in a continuous state of worship and adoration, without undue strain of her natural faculties.

The supernatural had become like the natural to her. Constantly that silent Life beneath her heart was lifting away created veils from before the face of the Uncreated. And so the Light within shone forth upon the moon and stars, the shower and the dew, the ice and snow, the dawn and darkness, the song of birds and the music of the fountains, and bid them bless the Lord in full sweet canticles of Mary's praise. The works of God thus held for her a deeply individual significance, for she gathered them all up into the warmth of her heart for the little unborn hand of Him Who had created them, the King Who ruled most perfectly within the kingdom of her love. "What have I in Heaven, and besides Thee what do I desire on earth?"⁶

⁵ Ez. 3:23.

⁶ Ps. 72:25.

The more humble we are, the more mighty is God's power in us. It became a very need for Mary's soul to plead with all creation to witness how the majesty and might of the Most High had wrought great things in her, because He had regarded her utter lowliness. "He bowed the heavens and came down."⁷

Christ participated in and sanctified her every thought and word and deed in those long nine months when He remained most intimately Mary's own. He sanctified them not only for her sake, but for her virgin mothering of the whole human race. He was one with her and she was one with Him, while in the silence of His own created heart He stored with reverent love the sweet, deep story of those wondrous days.

Mary, in turn, carried Him into the heart of all she did: her lying down and her rising, her daily home tasks, but most of all in plying the needle and loom as her busy fingers fashioned simple garments for the tender body and the fragile limbs—so strangely simple for Him Who is clothed in the glory of the Godhead.

If in an hour of heavenly prayer her soul folded itself about the Divinity abiding within, her thoughts turned to Him no less in her loving communings with her holy spouse, when the weakness and weariness of womanhood drew her to the comforting presence of Joseph. All this was to be possible once the Mystery of the Incarnation had been announced to Joseph and he was bidden by the angel to take unto himself Mary his wife.

But the divine marvel which stirred Mary's heart with unfathomable joy was the great truth that in her

⁷ Ps. 17:10.

own flesh and blood she could clothe the Son of God. Wonderful the thought that the eyes which would look into hers, the lips which would seek her kisses, the tongue which would prattle His love, the hands that would fondle her, and the feet that would follow in her guiding steps, would all have been tenderly formed out of her lifeblood and molded to the likeness of her own fair being. For was not that very being of Mary itself planned by God after the predestined Humanity of His own Incarnate Son, that so Christ, in turn, might assume the likeness of Mary, in which for all eternity He would be glorified before angels and men.

Possessed by the living Word within her, swayed by the Supreme Power imprisoned within the tender confines of her flesh, well might Mary exclaim: "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me."⁸

There are periods in a mother's life when the little fluttering soul of the unborn babe seems to draw to itself and absorb all thought, all aspiration, all physical power and activity, the very vitality of the mother's being; when it seems to lay hold of her with a silent strength. So Mary moved and had her being in the sweet tyranny of that engrossing life, "consumed yet quickened" by the vital Power which was draining to Itself the lifeblood of her heart and the life-love of her soul.

But with the draining of Mary's life into the little struggling life of her unborn Babe, in her heart throbbed the joyful realization of the fact of the God-man's helpless dependence upon her for His very life and for the salvation of the whole human race. Since God had thus decreed, He had placed Himself at her

⁸ Gal. 2:20.

mercy and tarried willingly the allotted time with her, while all the world was waiting for His coming. He fed upon her life as the Beloved among the lilies, while she breathed and moved under the loving watchfulness of the Father's eye, quenching the thirst of God's eternal love.

2

THE VISITATION

AND behold thy cousin Elizabeth," the angel had said to Mary, "she also hath conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren: because no word shall be impossible with God."¹

Not questioning the angel's word Mary set out to give aid to her aged relative, miraculously blessed with child by the Almighty.

It was a long journey, and difficult, partly through Galilee, partly through the unfriendly land of Samaria, and partly through the hill regions of Judaea, to the village of Karem where stood the home of Zachary and Elizabeth.

Who accompanied her as she rode over the narrow, winding paths, on the little beast of burden that so lightly carried her, while tabernacled within her breast she bore her Lord and God? Joseph could not as yet have been invited to accompany her, for the Mystery of the Incarnation was still unknown to him and Mary had been abiding in her mother's home. It was here, no doubt, that all provisions for her safety had been wisely taken.

So she arrived at Karem where beyond the olive trees

¹ Luke 1:36-37.

and palms came into sight the friendly cottage of Elizabeth. Descending quickly from her mount she hastened forward to salute her cousin.

And it came to pass, the holy writer tells us, that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth herself, filled with the Holy Spirit, in a loud voice greeted Mary, saying:

“Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?

“For behold, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy.”²

Then it was that the Incarnate Word dispensed His first recorded gift of grace through Mary. John in his mother’s womb, and Elizabeth as well, were filled with the Holy Ghost. The unborn child, endowed with the use of reason for at least that sacred moment, recognized the Savior and received from Him the gift of sanctifying grace, as had been predicted by the angel to Zachary: “And he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother’s womb.”³

Thus, through Mary, John was enabled to perform what we might call his first official act as the Pervancer of the Saviour.

Even so early, before Christ had visibly appeared among men, the role of Mary as Mediatrix of grace with her Divine Son was wonderfully made manifest. “Not before Mary arrived and saluted Elizabeth,” wrote Origen in the early centuries of the Church, “did the infant exult in the womb. But in the instant that Mary

² Ibid. 1:42-44.

³ Ibid. 1:15.

uttered the word with which the Son of God in His mother's womb inspired her, did the infant exult in joy.”⁴

Here let us pause a moment.

“Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee,” the angel had greeted Mary in the Mystery of the Annunciation.

“Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the Fruit of thy womb,” Elizabeth saluted her in the Mystery of the Visitation.

Set in sequence these two salutations, insert in their proper places the names of Mary and Jesus, and you have the first part of the “Hail Mary” as recited daily over all the earth:

“Hail [Mary], full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the Fruit of thy womb, [Jesus].” To this we but add our own part, the humble petition that we too may be helped by the power of her word with God: “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.”

There is the genesis of this most powerful and beautiful prayer, which rightly we couple with the “Our Father” taught us from the lips of Christ Himself.

But there is one more reason why in Elizabeth’s inspired reply to the salutation of Mary she calls her “Blessed.”

“Blessed,” she says, “art thou *that hast believed*, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord.”⁵

Implicit belief in His word is God’s urgent demand. Because Moses *twice* struck the rock that water might

⁴ Hom. vii, in Luc. 2.

⁵ Luke 1:45.

flow from it, the Lord severely showed His displeasure; but the simple faith of Mary in her unfaltering reply to the angel's message made possible the Redemption and with it the restoration of the supernatural life lost through Adam. In striking contrast to the unbelief of Eve stood the firm belief of Mary. "Blessed art thou that hast believed," and blessed in her is all mankind.

Deep within Mary's soul the Spirit of God was active, and taking up quickly the burden of Elizabeth's prophecy Mary herself broke forth into her own magnificent chant, the Canticle of All Canticles, that closes the long series of songs and psalms of the earlier ages, while for us it was to become the Hymn of a New Day where hope gives place to fulfilment and the law of fear recedes before the law of love. A most splendid cry of joy with which the high heavens re-echoed and the nine choirs of the angelic host worshipped the Babe in Mary's breast.

My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.

Because He hath regarded the lowliness of His
handmaid;
For behold from henceforth all generations shall
call me blessed.

Because He that is mighty hath done great things
to me;
And holy is His Name.

And His mercy is from generation unto generations,
To them that fear Him.

He hath showed might in His arm:
He hath scattered the proud in the conceit of
their hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seat,
And hath exalted the lowly.

He hath filled the hungry with good things;
And the rich He hath sent empty away.

He hath received Israel His servant, being mindful
of His mercy;
As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to
his seed forever.⁶

There is one great thought which runs through this mighty canticle wherein Mary humbles herself that she may magnify God. *Humilitas*, the word used in the Latin Vulgate, has in the third line above been rendered as "lowness," which there expresses its exact meaning. It is not humility which Mary ascribes to herself, but it is humility which she practices. She can find but one reason why God selected precisely her out of all the children of men, and that reason is her own utter "lowness"—her insignificance in the eyes of men. Thus all power redounds to God alone, and nothing is alleged as due herself.

Charmingly the thought of the lowness of Mary, as here described, is echoed by the poet Patmore when naïvely he inquires of her:

Say, did his sisters wonder what could Joseph see
In a mild, silent little maid like thee?

Littleness, Confidence, Self-Surrender. These are the foundation of Mary's greatness, so far as that depended on her own co-operation. No one in our day, it may well seem, has pierced with such startling vision to the very core of the significance contained in these three

⁶ Luke 1:46-55.

words as did Thérèse of the Child Jesus, when she gave to the world her secret of "Spiritual Childhood." Briefly expressed, it is "the way of confidence and self-surrender"; and from these two practices, she tells us, follows love. Most like the little Mary, she was satisfied in her daily life to cast to Jesus the flowers of "little sacrifices"—as she deigned to call them—and "win Him with caresses." Hence in her too is something of that deep and simple faith of Mary which made it possible for her to add in childlike daring: "That is what I have done, and that is why I shall be so well received."

Mighty things God had done for Mary. Forward she looked into the future, in her great Canticle of the *Magnificat*, and prophetically beheld how all generations should call her "Blessed," even to the end of days. Backward, too, she gazed, through the long vista of years, into the distant past, where instance after instance of Jewish history unfolded itself to her, how God had "showed might in His arm," how the proud were scattered in the conceit of their heart, and the mighty cast down from their seat, and the rich sent empty away. Through her mind, inspired by the Spirit of God, might naturally have flashed a passage from the canticle of Anna, the mother of Samuel:

The bow of the mighty is overcome, and the weak
are girt with strength.
They that were full before have hired themselves
out for bread.⁷

But God had shown mercy to "Israel, His servant," meaning the people of God, "as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever."

⁷ 1 Kings 2:4, 5.

Like a great orchestral close, the song of Mary ends on this great theme. But the seed of Abraham are spiritually the children of the Church through all the ages—that Spouse of Christ in whom alone the prophecies of old are verified and the ancient figures have at length reached their sublime fulfilment.

Just one more verse is added by St. Luke to conclude the Scripture account of Mary's visit to Elizabeth, a precious verse, for it tells us that for "about three months" Mary abode with her cousin, performing evidently her lowly work of neighborliness and charity. "And she returned to her own house."⁸

⁸ Luke 1:56.

3

JOSEPH'S PERPLEXITY

IF MARY followed the rabbinical counsel of her day she would have been only about twelve and a half years old when espoused to Joseph. Another complete year would then have elapsed before the public marriage could take place, when amid solemn ceremonies Joseph would bring her from her parental home to abide with him under his own roof. Conventional literature, however, ascribes to her the age of about fifteen at the time of her marriage.

Espousals among the Jews were quite different in their effect from "engagement" in our day. They actually constituted a true and legal marriage. So, when the Scripture says, "In the six month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David,"¹ it follows that Joseph was then her real husband.

Contrary, however, to former opinion, as held since the day of St. Jerome, it is now definitely clear that during this entire year of the Espousal a strict virginity was obligatory.²

¹ Luke 1:26-27.

² Filas, *The Man Nearest to Christ*, p. 77. This author also contests St. Jerome's assumption that Joseph learned of Mary's motherhood from any external signs; see pp. 78-81. The fact of Mary's motherhood was doubtless revealed to him in due time by Mary's closest intimate, her mother, with whom at that period she was staying.

From Scripture itself we know that the Mystery of the Annunciation took place no later than three months previous to the public marriage. The fact is plain from St. Luke's statement that Mary returned from her visit to Elizabeth after three months had elapsed. The year of the Espousal apparently was drawing to its close and she hastened back to her mother's home.

It was the Eternal Father's will that His Only Begotten Son should be born of a virgin mother—but of a *married* virgin, that so the Mystery of the Incarnation might be duly guarded. Mary, too, would need the solace and help of her virginal spouse, not in the ordinary necessities of life alone, but also in the great trials that were to come upon her and the Child.

The union of Joseph and Mary, as husband and wife, was evidently pledged to be purely virginal. A silent inspiration must have guided them both, that "from a virginal marriage might be born a Virginal Son."³

Little though the divine plans were known to Joseph, in the Providence of God his marriage and his perpetual virginity both had as their purpose the birth of the God-man, though the very contrary seemed even to Mary herself implied in it. "How shall this be done, because I know not man?" was equivalent on her part to asking: "How can I become the Mother of the Messias when I am pledged to an inviolable virginity?" To this the angel replied that through the virtue of the Holy Spirit would take place miraculously, without intervention of man, the Virginal Conception of Christ. "And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."⁴ What seemingly had made impossible

³ St. Jerome, *Contr. Helv.*, 14.

⁴ Luke 1:34, 35.

her Motherhood of God was precisely the condition of its realization.

But now that the Incarnation had been divinely wrought and God abode within her flesh, she did not feel free to divulge this Secret of the King—even to her own spouse, until the will of God should have been made manifest to her.

Already God Himself had miraculously revealed the secret to Elizabeth without word from Mary. In His own time He could make it known to Joseph, whether by herself, or in any other way He pleased. It was for her to pray and wait, distressing though this silence must become. God understood. Was she not in His hands! So Mary's will remained resigned to His, however great the suffering might be for her and for her virginal spouse.

As for Joseph, he was to undergo this ordeal so that the fact of the Divine Incarnation might be made most indubitable to all the world, while his own virtue in turn would shine out the more resplendently.

Gold is refined by fire and only so attains its highest purity and splendor.

Being a "just man," as the Holy Spirit vouches, Joseph obviously would allow no faintest shadow of suspicion ever to fall on Mary, even in the most hidden recesses of his own heart. Like gossamer suspended in the air his judgment was ever ready to be stirred and swayed by the slightest breathing of the Spirit of God. Selfish considerations could have no part in his deliberation.

How long the inscrutable counsels of God permitted this silent, agonizing suffering for husband and wife is not known precisely. But most fruitful it was to be for

them and all the world, attesting still further, to all future generations, by a new special angelic intervention, the truth of the Virginal Conception.

The trial may have been short as it was intense. Certainly it was far greater than that of Abraham bidden to sacrifice his son Isaac. For what could be the love of a thousand fathers compared to the love of Joseph for Mary! God Himself loved her more than He loved all the world of angels and of saints besides, and to Joseph He had given a heart capable of an affection great, refined, and ardent enough to be worthy of her.

If God rewarded Abraham by making him the father of offspring numberless as the sands of the sea and the stars of the heavens, how magnificent was to be His reward for Joseph, to whom at this very moment He was about to commit, solemnly and formally, the Virgin Mother of His Incarnate Son, and to whom thereafter, through future years, were to be entrusted all the millions of the faithful, placed under his protecting care as Patron of the Universal Church.

Overcome, perhaps, by the natural violence of his mental struggle and the exhausting anguish of his faithful heart, Joseph had sunk at last into a blessed sleep. Then it was that God's angel came and announced to him the secret which Mary had so delicately kept sealed within her heart.

The simple facts are told us as they could be gleaned from Mary's own lips or from those who had heard them from her virgin spouse. They are recorded by the Apostle-Evangelist, St. Matthew, who could readily have had access to the witnesses.

"Now the generation of Christ was in this wise," he begins. "Whereas His mother Mary was espoused to

Joseph, before they came together, she was found with Child, of the Holy Ghost. Whereupon Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing publicly to expose her, was minded to put her away privately. But while he thought on these things, behold the angel of the Lord appeared to him in his sleep, saying: 'Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a Son: and thou shalt call His name Jesus. For He shall save His people from their sins.' Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet, saying: 'Behold a virgin shall be with Child, and bring forth a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.'⁵

The prophecy of Isaias referred to here was familiar to Joseph. But what astonishment for him to learn that the Virgin predicted centuries ago, as the Mother of the future Messias, was in very truth his own Immaculate Bride! What a deep sense of unworthiness arose in his profoundly humble soul! Yet a scion of David's royal line was Joseph, the noblest of his house, gentle in word, firm in strength and courage, and prompt above all in action when God's will was made known to him.

"And Joseph, rising up from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and took unto him his wife."⁶

What tears of gladness in Mary's eyes, what light of understanding in her glance, as with profoundest worship Joseph bowed and silently adored her God and

⁵ Matt. 1:18-23.

⁶ Ibid. 24.

his—the same Who in the years gone by had spoken in lightnings and in thunder upon Sinai, but now was tabernacled in a Maiden's breast!

All bitterness was turned to sweet, all darkness into splendor.

So now, without delay, the marriage ceremony could be held.

"Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come. For winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land."⁷

Now from her mother's embrace was the bride brought into the home of her betrothed. Now, with lighted lamps and sprays of myrtle in their hands, the white-clad maidens led the way, while harp and flute and song merrily ushered the Holy Pair into the home prepared for them. But in Joseph's heart it was the Holy Spirit Who sang the mystic bridal song.

Likest to Mary was Joseph, yet different. Happily, together they blended into one perfect harmony, with Jesus in their midst. And so was reflected on earth, as never before, the Mystery of the Most Blessed Trinity.

With Mary and Jesus, Joseph too belongs to the Hierarchy of the Incarnation. Into that mystic circle, suffused with the splendors of Divinity, none other can enter: not Seraph nor Saint, not Martyr nor Apostle, not Patriarch nor Prophet. It is the Order of the Hypostatic Union, reserved alone for Jesus, Mary, Joseph.

⁷ Cant. 2:10-12.

4

THE EXPECTATION

SAFE in the care of her virginal spouse, surrounded by his reverent love, solicitously provided for by him, Mary might now go in joy about her wifely duties, at the same time worshipfully preparing for the great day when she should look for the first time on the face of her Creator, made her Child.

What joy when the day's tasks were done, to have near her in Joseph a soul to whom she could communicate her own high thoughts and longings, and who in turn could share the same with her. United in the love of Christ, that love of Mary and Joseph for each other was constantly to grow. Devotion to Christ would continue to lend sacredness, through all future centuries, to the nuptial bond of every Christian union.

The center of Mary's life was Christ. In all things she knew but the lowly yielding of her entire being to the will of that secret Life within her. Brain, heart, members, all gave of their best that Christ might be magnified thereby in the perfect surrender of creature to Creator.

"Now, also shall Christ be magnified in my body," Mary might have said, in anticipation of the great Apostle. "For me to live is Christ."¹

¹ Phil. 1:20, 21.

Obedience to God's will had made of Mary His perfect instrument, and the knowledge of this was one of her most exquisite joys. Because of the perfection of that submission to God's good pleasure, the divine Voice within her broke in perpetual music across the silence of her soul, and guided her unerringly in the holy government of her life for the best interests of her Incarnate God.

Each faculty of her soul, each affection of her heart, stainless and unblemished, was lifted as a crystal cup for the still fuller outpourings of perfections, and in its depth there lay the radiant image of her God.

Day by day drew near that great event which the Prophets had foretold, and for which the nations longed with eager expectation: "Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the Just One; let the earth be opened and bud forth a Savior."²

The life of Mary was enfolded in Christ, and Christ was embodied in her. In Him she moved and lived and had her being. Her silence was pregnant with the Word of God. She was the embodied Speech of the Eternal, expressing His every wish in her thoughts and words and actions. To the fine ear of the spiritual soul she was the systole and diastole of the love of the Divine Heart.

But sweetness was combined in her with strength. As, from time to time, the awful might and majesty of God drew close to Mary's soul, and compassed it about, flesh and blood must have trembled at the nearness of the Infinite: "This is no other than the house of God, and the gate of Heaven."³ When grace assumed the form of

² Is. 45:8.

³ Gen. 28:17.

a tempest of spiritual elements, and shook and swayed and bowed that soul like a lily before the storm—then, indeed, must the tiny hand of the Divine Babe have been slipped between Mary's heart and the hand of the Mighty Majesty of God to gently still her quivering spirit: "My heart was troubled for fear of Thy Majesty."⁴ But never for a moment was her confidence to be shaken or her trust to be disturbed: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."⁵

Ah, the contracting power of that Baby-hand to wake the imprisoned Mother-love and lead it victorious athwart the trembling flesh—that love, strong with the superhuman strength of its sublime destiny, strong with the appealing helplessness of its heavenly Burden, strong with its solemn *Credo* in the Unborn Word. At the depth of Mary's soul remained perpetually the peace of God, as her body was chalicing His Word.

"The Lord will give thee rest continually, and will fill thy soul with brightness."⁶

We question sometimes, when God transmutes our pain into sudden joy, and leads us into His garden of delights, whether, indeed, pain is not the sweetest road to His Heart, the most joyous because the most worthy and ingratiating. It is a royal road, whereon the feet of princes may tread in the footsteps of the King. The "brightness" which the Father infused into Mary's troubled spirit bore it safely through the haunting shadows of the night and the human terrors of the dark unknown which her untried feet must tread, until at last they would bring her to face the double anguish, bravely and unfaintingly, beneath the outstretched arms of the Cru-

⁴ Esther 15:16.

⁵ Job 13:15.

⁶ Is. 58:11.

cified. He orders all things sweetly in His Wisdom: pain and anguish, joy and love.

How incalculably precious to God must have been Mary's physical as well as spiritual safety. The souls of the saints, as Faber says, are "haunted souls," filled with the mysterious experiences of the spiritual world. There is a rapture wherein the flesh itself seems almost to become transformed into the spiritual texture of the soul—as though the luminous presence of God imparted to it a faint infusion of the glorified state, to enable it to be subjected in safety to His more intimate manifestations. With what tenderly solicitous care, then, must not God have spiritualized Mary's body to bear the long exhausting drain upon it from her "haunted soul"!

Did she not live in one long union with God, which glorified every humble deed of her hand, every path she trod, every thought and word, every motion of her love-laden heart? So keyed in her was the frail, mortal flesh that it answered perfectly and sweetly to all the harmonious operations of the Most High—the flesh that harbored God and should not know corruption, the flesh whereof the Lord of all had taken flesh.

And now drew near the time of His coming: "For yet a little while and a very little while, and He that is to come, will come, and will not delay."⁷

How wistfully, and yet with what unconquerable longing, did Mary fix her eyes upon that hour, when she was to behold at last the Word made flesh. There would be the end of the most intimate, the most secret, what might seem the most divinely wonderful, of all her joys. But in its place was to succeed another, the very thought of which thrilled her soul with dreams of

⁷ Heb. 10:37.

blissful possession—the joy wherein her Mother-love and worship might at last satiate themselves on the supreme Object of her desire.

Was it joy or pain, that she must share her Beloved with all the wide world, with friend and foe, with the loving and the unloving? Never again would He be so entirely hers.

She must indeed deliver Him to the world, she who with more than a Mother's passionate love would shield Him, her Son and God, from the cold glance of an indifferent eye, the touch of a careless hand.

And yet, as her arms closed in dreams about the tender form of the Divine Babe resting in the warmth of her breast, her Mother-love overflowed into the wide boundless world of His, as a river flows into the fullness of the sea, and was lost in its far-reaching tides that ebb and flow with strong enticements about the hearts of men.

"O God, my God, to Thee do I watch at break of day. For Thee my soul hath thirsted; for Thee my flesh, O how many ways!"⁸

With all her race Mary indeed had thirsted for the coming of the Messias; and during those quite secluded years, in the shadowy glory of the Temple, her soul had fed upon the golden promises of the Sacred Books and the secret visions of their fulfilment. She longed and suffered with her race. Now, as the time drew near, the old eager longing conquered the deep sweet absorption of her hidden joy, and she craved to relinquish it that she might enter into the boundless joy of God's supreme will in this long-awaited and crowning gift of the Redeemer made visible among men. And so,

⁸ Ps. 62:2.

as day by day her spirit rose upon the faint, pure wings of morning, it carried with it the heartfelt cry of her burdened race:

"O that Thou wouldst rend the heavens and wouldst come down!"⁹

In union with her Divine Son her soul was straitened until, by the bestowal upon the world of the Fruit of her immaculate maternity, she might still further accomplish her share in the redemption of mankind.

Then, with the tender glory of her Divine Motherhood flashing in her eyes, Mary turned towards the hills of Judah, as she whispered through the breaking day:

"Out of Sion the loveliness of His beauty. God shall come manifestly: our God shall come, and shall not keep silence."¹⁰

⁹ Is. 64:1.

¹⁰ Ps. 49:2-3.

5

THE VIRGIN BIRTH

THE time of Mary's Expectation was not without sore trial. Hardly had the angel's message been brought to her and the Word become incarnate within her, than she thought of Joseph. On God alone it depended to make known to him her Secret of the King. It was not for her to reveal.

Her visit to Elizabeth had providentially removed her from Nazareth. But soon after her return some four months would have expired since the great event of the Annunciation. With these, too, the year of her espousal was drawing to a close. Her difficulties deepened. Yet once more God intervened for her and through an angel solved Joseph's perplexity.

But with the public marriage celebrated, it was Joseph's duty now to safeguard Mary's honor and the legitimacy of her Divine Child. God indeed would provide, but man, too, must do his part. For a third time, Heaven's aid was not wanting, for what indeed could have been more providential than the decree of Caesar Augustus, that "the whole world [meaning the Roman Empire] should be enrolled." Like a wise man Joseph must at once have used this opportunity to leave Nazareth for a length of time, though apparently only to enroll in the city of Bethlehem, as the law required.

Not more than about five months remained, from the

date of the public marriage, before the expected birth of the Divine Child. What mercy would the Nazarenes show to Mary should suspicion be aroused at this? Evidently Joseph could not now remain in Nazareth. He must live for a length of time where both he and his newly wedded wife could be unknown. Above all, he must leave at once.

No slightest Scripture warrant exists for the almost invariable supposition that the journey to Bethlehem took place immediately before the birth of Christ. Since the law of enrollment allowed abundant time, why should Joseph hazard the life of Mary on so difficult and tortuous a journey in the dangerous condition in which she would then have been? What was even a graver consideration, why should he expose both her and the Child to the slightest possibility of suspicion on the part of the Nazarenes?

All the Scripture says is that *while Joseph and Mary actually were in Bethlehem*—“when they were there”¹—Mary’s days were accomplished that she should be delivered. Joseph was of all men no procrastinator. He was highly prudent no less than prompt and sure in action. With the greatest treasures of all the world entrusted to his single care, he would run no hazards, whatever might be the difficulties for him to gain a livelihood for Mary and himself. For the rest, God once more would provide.

Joseph’s confidence in God and his abandonment to the Divine Will were surpassed only by those of Mary herself.

Arriving at Bethlehem, Joseph may have found some lowly home where he could sufficiently support Mary

¹ Luke 2:6. Cf. Filas, *op. cit.*, pp. 82–84.

and himself by simple carpentry. When Mary's time was come, he naturally would seek for better accommodation in the small caravansary inn. And when he found this occupied and the need had become extreme, there was but one other refuge left that at least provided the necessary room and privacy. It was the stable.

Palestinian caves, whose deep hollows could be used as a shelter for cattle or beasts of burden, often had a crude wooden shed for an entrance. It was such a place, then unused, which Joseph found, festooned with dusty cobwebs, with stained straw and broken litter on the floor. There, to one side, stood an empty manger. Filled with some dried grasses from the narrow stable loft and covered with a white sheet gently spread by Mary's immaculate hands, this could readily be used for a crib. Then the manger-throne was ready for the coming of the King of kings.

Here is the story entire, as the Scripture tells it. The rest our reasoning has sought to supply as best it could:

And it came to pass that in those days there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that the whole world should be enrolled. This enrolling was first made by Cyrius, the governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, every one into his own city.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem: because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary his espoused wife, who was with child.

And it came to pass, that *when they were there*, her days were accomplished, that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.²

² Luke 2:1-7.

It was night when the Divine Child was born. This we know from the appearance of the angel host to the shepherds keeping watch over their flocks on the starlit hills.

In silence and secrecy God works stupendous wonders. The hearts of men sleep on, but angels fold their wings in worship where in the stable of Bethlehem the Almighty Word of God made flesh is silently born into this world. Heaven pauses in wonder, and Mary kneels in adoration before her God Who has become her Son.

Miraculously, inviolately, without the pain and throes of childbirth, the ever-maiden Mother had brought into the world her Divine Child. As a Virgin she had conceived Him by the Virtue of the Holy Ghost, as a Virgin she had borne Him by the Might of the Most High, to Whom all things are possible. Now, then, was fulfilled the "sign" which centuries ago the Prophet Isaias had predicted should be given to the House of David: "Behold a Virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son."³

Virginal was to be the conception and virginal the birth of Christ; and He should be called "Emmanuel," the Prophet added—a word interpreted by the Evangelist as meaning "God with us," and thus expressing the divine nature of the future Messias.⁴

Most beautifully Ezechiel had typified Mary, in the miraculous Virginal Birth of the Savior, by that closed gate through which the Lord should pass, and yet which should not be opened.⁵ "A garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up," the Fathers were to call her in the words of the Sacred Text.⁶ At one with the universal Church, unanimously they proclaim her a Virgin in her Child's

³ Is. 7:14.

⁴ Matt. 1:23.

⁵ Ez. 44:2.

⁶ Cant. 4:12.

conception, a Virgin in His birth, and a Virgin forever after.

Like light through the purest of crystals did the Savior pass through the inviolate body of Mary, even as His own glorified Body was thereafter to go forth through the sealed stone of His tomb. But only the former action can be considered miraculous, since to pass through solid substance is the natural property of the glorified body. Mighty indeed are the works of God and unsearchable His ways.

"And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger."

There we behold her, prostrate in adoration. Who knows what deep insight into the mysteries of God is granted her in that unspeakable rapture of heavenly contemplation as before her lies the Divine Babe, in the light of the lantern placed at her side by Joseph.

In those features she glimpses, with an ecstasy of joy, the long-dreamed-of likeness of herself. But in that Baby breast, as in the placid waters of a tiny lake, she knows are mirrored all the marvels and the glories of the Godhead. God of God, Light of light, true God of true God, the living and substantial Image of the Father—such, and no less, is the Babe before her—yet flesh of her flesh, substance of her substance.

Surcharged with the divine grace of her Motherhood, Mary's keen intelligence reaches out upon the inspiration of adoring love, and is steeped in the wonders of the Godhead, so simple, yet inscrutable. For "Thy way is in the sea, and Thy paths in many waters: and Thy footsteps shall not be known."⁷ One hardly dares draw

⁷ Ps. 76:20.

near with reverent, bated breath, to catch the glorious reflection of those shining waters upon Mary's rapt, transfigured face.

Her first deep adoration done, Mary folds to her breast the Son of her virginal heart, holding Him to herself, with all the eager love and sacred thrill of the most perfect human motherhood.

Joseph has stirred in the shadow of the cave and, blinded by the beauty of the vision, he casts himself before his God at Mary's breast. The little hands are tenderly held out to him, and with all the love of fatherhood he prints on them his kisses and moistens them with tears of joy.

But for us, too, Christ has come. He is in our midst, the long desired, the eagerly expected: Emmanuel, "God with us." Men know Him not as yet, but a new life is about to pulse through the world: an ampler, stronger, resuscitating life of grace, in which the souls of men are to be divinely re-created. Men are at last to know God as He has never before been known: not merely intimately, personally, but made evident to their sense. They are to touch and see and hear Him. They are to lean upon His breast and minister to His wants, to question and adore. They are to share His triumphs and ignominies, to love or despise, abandon or defend Him. The Son of God has come into our midst!

How different these surroundings of the Savior's Birth from anything that Joseph and Mary could possibly have anticipated in their eager expectation of His coming.

Busily had Mary's hands made every preparation. Lovingly the soft white linen had been spun and laid away with aromatic spices between its immaculate folds.

The little crib was somewhere standing ready, made by Joseph with the best of skill and the most ardent devotion. Sweetly was the Divine Guest to be welcomed to all the affection and comfort which their home, however humble, could afford.

But not such was God's Providence. There was in store for Mary and Joseph a mystery of divine disappointment, which would be most blessed in its results for the whole world, and not least of all for these two devoted souls themselves, teaching them to understand more intimately the ways of God, and to rise unto still greater heights of holiness and love, with complete relinquishment of themselves into the hands of God. There was many another mystery of divine disappointment, humanly incomprehensible, awaiting them in the future.

Not into the simple comforts of a home, however humble, was Jesus to be born, but amid the cold and poverty and utter destitution of a dark forsaken stable, where a manger would be His crib, and the straw that Joseph's hands could gather would form His royal bedding. Surely a welcome such as God alone could have thought of preparing for the coming into the world of His Only-Begotten Son, to teach mankind the nothingness of earthly pomp and riches. There, then, in the embrace of the little Nazarene Maiden lies the Incarnate Power of the Most High. All Heaven is in her arms, folded to her heart, as close to herself as she holds the tiny Body of that Babe; God and Man; Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, all substantially united within the infant breast of Mary's Child.

"What have I in heaven, and besides Thee what do I desire upon earth?

"For Thee my flesh and my heart hath fainted away:
Thou are the God of my heart, and the God that is my
portion forever."⁸

⁸ Ps. 72:25-26.

6

THE INFANT GOD

HOW beautiful, how adorable the newborn Christ is in His very weakness and helplessness, committed entirely to the hands and the heart of the little Maiden Mary. He the Immeasurable, the Imponderable Light, is made visible to human eyes. Here He lies, sensible to us in the touch of the flesh, the sound of the voice, the cry of human pain, the vision of His loveliness. We lift Him in our trembling arms—the yielding little body, the limbs grown limp with sleep—and we stagger under the weight. Our arms grow weak and almost break beneath the wonder and sweetness of the heavenly burden. . . . For lo! It is our God.

In a drop of dew the glory of the sky may be reflected, but in the breast of that tiny Babe is contained substantially all the Majesty of God.

Invisibly around that crib are adoring angel legions, but without, above the grassy hillsides, the skies grow suddenly luminous where shepherds watch their flocks. And behold an angel of the Lord stands by them, and the brightness of God shines round about them, and a great fear takes hold on them. They cast themselves upon their faces.

"Fear not," the angel voice is heard to say, "for, be-

hold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people. For this day is born to you, in the city of David, a Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: You shall find the Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger."

With the angel appears a whole multitude of the heavenly army, praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of good will."

Then, slowly, the glory fades in the skies and from the hills the echoes die away. Filled with wonderment the shepherds rise from where they have cast themselves on the ground, and looking at one another exclaim: "Let us go over to Bethlehem, and let us see this word that is come to pass, which the Lord hath shown to us."¹ Coming with haste they find Mary and Joseph, and the Infant lying in the manger.

What could have been more fitting than that the first chosen to appear before Christ should be the humble, faithful shepherds? Christ Himself, in His human nature, was descended from the house of David, the shepherd lad of Bethlehem, who on those selfsame hills had fed his father's flocks. It was David, who with staff and sling and five smooth pebbles stowed in his shepherd scrip, had fearlessly gone out to battle with the Philistine Goliath, the man from Geth, clad in armor of war, with sword and spear and shield, representing the pride and might and panoply of worldly power which Christ would conquer on the bloody Cross.

"Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield," were the words David hurled at the giant of brass and steel, "but I come to thee in the name

¹ Luke 2:8-15.

of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, which thou hast defied.”²

It was that God Who had come in human form to assume the role of the Good Shepherd, Whom His sheep would know and follow, and Who would seek afar those that had strayed from the fold. “I am the Good Shepherd,” He would say, “and I know mine, and mine know Me. . . . And I lay down My life for My sheep. And other sheep I have, that are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd.”³

It was the same Son of man, here wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger, Who should come in glory, and all the angels with Him, to sit on the seat of His Majesty. “And all nations shall be gathered together before Him, and He shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats: And He shall set the sheep on His right side, but the goats on His left.”⁴

Knowing all this we understand why precisely to the shepherds His message was sent and why His Heart went out to them as they offered simple homage and presented humble gifts.

Children know one another best, and here is a mother who has followed her shepherd husband and has brought her little one close to the side of the Crib. Sweetly the child offers its trinket to Mary’s Babe, which delightedly looks upon the happy giver, and as the little fingers close upon the trifling gift, heavenly blessings go out in return from the Heart of God. Heaven itself

² I Kings 17:45.

³ John 10:14-16.

⁴ Matt. 25:32-33.

is bestowed on us for the trifles of earth, and priceless Love in return for the little hearts we give Him.

There is a strangely disproportionate strength in the tenacious grip of baby fingers. The outer, relaxing muscles are so undeveloped; the inner, so responsive to the blind instinct to retain. So it was with the Divine Babe. That little hand was clasped for all time about the universe, and held in its rose-leaf cup the souls of men.

The muscles of Love were strong with the strength of Divinity; those of Justice weak with the weakness of humanity.

But the shepherds have departed and the Divine Babe lies locked in Mary's arms, the slumber-home of the Incarnate God. Her whole soul yearns over Him, folds itself about Him, strains Him to herself in a transport of maternal tenderness. Well she knows that precious years, seeming like flying moments, will vanish with their hidden joy; and then the storm will break across her heart. Oh the tremendous anticipative sacrifice of that Mother-love! But the little hidden body warms her heart with an excess of Divine grace and her face droops in its flower-beauty into the face upon her breast; and all is well.

The Divine Babe lies locked in Mary's arms. Back and forth she paces, watching the strange, inscrutable look which every baby wears, here doubly inscrutable in the unfathomable eyes of the Infant God. Her soul searches those mysterious depths and trembles with holy fear and purest joy. How like a prelude to the Beatific Vision those blessed moments are. Can she break the silence with the sweet witchery of a song that those

delicate eyes may close? But the veils fall, and unbidden the soft low canticle of her love breaks from the mother-heart and lays its spell upon the quivering lids:

"How beautiful art Thou, my Love, how beautiful
art Thou!
Thy eyes are dove's eyes, besides what is hid within."⁶

The angels catch up the burden of her lullaby where, with the weight of love, her own voice breaks and dies away. God sleeps!

Reluctantly, at last the little Form is laid within the manger bed. All is still, but Mary's heart is restless with the restlessness of ever-watchful motherhood. Close she lies to Him, upon her rude couch, tired with the sweet weariness of mother cares and weakness. But, how fair He is. He must be cold. How helpless He lies in the strange, silent, baby-endurance that only a mother sees! The mother-heart will not be denied. She reaches out and draws Him stealthily from the cold manger into the throbbing shelter of her breast.

The Baby-lids are sealed with Mary's kisses. The little Form, folded perchance in the soft skin of one of the shepherd's lambs, is laid back in the humble manger. Mary is free to feast her heart in secret adoration. Her eyes linger worshipfully over the perfect features, the upturned cup of the rose-leaf palm, the rhythmic heaving of the breast. All perfect, all divinely perfect! But hear, in the silence, a sudden sigh.

The pathos, the strange incongruity of a baby's sigh: half sigh, half sob. The sigh that struggled from the

⁶ Cant. 4:1.

Soul of Incarnate Divinity, and breaks upon the coral reef of Baby lips.

The Child has wandered in His dreams back to His Father's home. His little hands have set ajar the heavenly portal; He has leaned His golden head against the bars, and raised His wistful eyes to the splendor of The Eternal—the divinely self-willed Exile from His Father's house. His little hands reach out and sun themselves in the celestial fires of His native glory; His little face quivers in the silver sea of angelic wings; His heart throbs to the ecstasy of the heavenly choirs. He seeks His Father's eyes . . . and oh, the great, living, palpitating silence that falls upon that interchange of love. . . .

Then—a deep loneliness folds itself about the little Heart. The crimson sign of the Cross traces itself upon His breast; the symbols of the Passion silently form upon the hands and feet and head and side; and pitifully the little Figure turns from His Father's home.

Through the bars of sleep He breaks with a sobbing sigh upon His lips.

Well may the watchful mother wonder as on the waking lips of her Child now appears a radiant smile. With joy the Divine Victim embraces the saving mission for which He has come into this world: to suffer and to die for us. And in His Heart He whispers to the Eternal Father:

“Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not; but a Body Thou hast fitted to Me: holocausts for sin did not please Thee. . . . Behold I come: in the head of the book it is written of Me that I should do Thy Will, O God!”⁶

* * *

⁶ Heb. 10:5-7; Ps. 39:7-9.

The cry of the Infant Christ. How it carries upon its plaint the cry of all humanity. Again and again the echo of it breaks through the Christmas jubilations as the uplifting arms of the Cross cast their shadows athwart the golden Star of Bethlehem.

Christ loved us so insatiably, He was drawn to clothe Himself in our flesh that He might endure pain and speak to our hearts in its language for all time.

Prophetically, that Baby cry carries through the night the grief of Gethsemane. It is the tender anticipation of the cry of Agony which in all its awfulness will be heard breaking forth in the hour of dereliction upon Calvary. Now silenced in the bosom of Mary, it will at last be silenced in the bosom of the Father.

Here, indeed, Mary is for the Son of God His bed of aromatic spices, the lilies whereon He feeds. Nowhere can He find such perfect comfort as at His Mother's breast, in her immaculate arms that circle Him about like the Father's love.

How hungrily the mother watched for the dawn of the first smile upon her Baby's lips. How softly it breaks, in little tremulous dimples, and quivers in a tiny cleft of chin; and claims the melting love and tearful joy in Mary's eyes.

A thing to be prayed for, and labored for—the smile of God. A thing to bathe one's soul in. Better even than tears of sorrow, the worshipful tears of joy. Purer, more exalted, containing less of self, and more of God. That heavenly tyranny of Divine joy which grips and exalts the soul to breathless heights in the firmament of God's Beauty, and sets it fainting in the bosom of the Eternal.

"Nothing but adoration will fill a created spirit to

the brim with joy, and nothing will set flowing the spring of adoration more resistlessly than contemplation of the Beauty of God."⁷

⁷ Father Faber.

7

THE FACE OF CHRIST

SHE fell upon her face, and worshipping upon the ground, said to him: 'Whence cometh this to me?' ¹ Thus, before Booz, as he came out of Bethlehem, lay the Moabitess Ruth, overwhelmed with gratitude for the favors shown her by this man.

But in the presence of the Most High, come in human form to the very same Bethlehem, the Little Maiden Mary, His handmaid and His Mother, is favored infinitely more. Her face is buried deep in the bosom of her God.

Fulfilled now are the Prophet's words: "And thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda: out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be the Ruler of Israel: and His going forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity."²

Blessed indeed among all women is she who was chosen to be the Mother of her God. And favored among all the cities of the earth is the little town of Bethlehem, where He was to be born in time Whose heavenly Birth is "from the days of eternity." In those beautiful words the Prophet predicted the Divinity as well as the humanity of the celestial Babe Whose first human worshipper was Mary.

¹ Ruth 2:10.

² Mich. 5:2.

"Be still and see that I am God."³

Ah, it is good to worship in the bosom of God; to be, lips and eyes, so close to the Face of Christ. That is Mary's privilege before all others.

How far away now lies the dormant world. Too holy is this hour, too blinding with the glory of God, too thronged with the worship of adoring angel hosts, too hushed with the music of celestial choirs, for the cold, irreverent touch of its ungodly hand.

But how can created flesh and spirit bear the long deep ecstasy of the joy of Divine Motherhood? That indeed is an important question, and the answer is that Mary's soul is strong in joy as in suffering, and in both alike wholly subject to the Heavenly Will.

After the humanity of Christ, no human body and soul were ever made so wonderfully as those of Mary, ever adapted so exquisitely to their purpose, or privileged to enjoy in such plenitude the Divine co-operation of the Spirit of God Who overshadowed her. It was not hard, therefore, for her to attune her own purely human life to this divine relationship, which henceforth and forever would exist between herself and God.

For Mary, a new life had begun.

No soul is ever quite the same once it has looked closely upon the veiled glory of God through the medium of the strong, supernatural light of the Holy Spirit. St. Teresa is an illustrious example of the transformation wrought by the intimate Presence of Christ.

Such a soul may deteriorate. It may fluctuate with the mutability of the human will. The spirit of the world may intervene and obscure with its baleful light the beauty of that vision. Yet there it lies: a subterra-

³ Ps. 45:11.

nean lake, in whose motionless depths broods the Image of the Most High. Only the sweep of an angel's wing may be needed to awaken its spirit of healing and impart eternal life to the rescued soul.

"I have seen God face to face, and my soul has been saved,"⁴ exclaimed Jacob after wrestling with the Angel who appeared to him in the form of a man.⁵ It was God, in fact, Who strengthened Jacob in this struggle that he might have firm confidence thereafter in His aid.

And Jacob named the place Phanuel, which can be translated "the Face of God."

To have seen God, not only with the understanding, with the strong apprehension of the loving heart, but to have seen Him under the direct and super-abounding grace of the Holy Spirit, lighting up the Beauty of the face of Christ for us—that is indeed the nearest prelude to salvation which the love of the Father bestows upon favored souls to hold them fast.

What must have been, besides, to Mary the outward portrayal of the Soul of Christ! None ever saw what Mary saw in those heavenly lineaments of her Son. None could ever say with the same sublime knowledge: "I have seen God face to face."

The vision of the Divine Face of Christ was to remain with Mary always: "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee."⁶ Her soul should live by it and see all things in its light. It would spell for her the lessons of joy and sorrow, pain and peace. It would lead her into ever more profound depths of the Mysteries of God, and fortify her beyond power of defeat against the tragedy of the days to come.

Our soul, too, cries out for the vision to which some

⁴ Gen. 32:30.

⁵ Osee 12:4.

⁶ IV Kings 2:2.

day, pray God, it shall attain, in a manner not possible for us here below.

Only by daily living face to face with God, do we inure ourselves to the increasing weight of the cross, and learn to defy the weakness of the flesh with a growing ease which fills our timorous soul with tearful joy. We fix our eyes on the Face of Christ, and its sweetness and its power enter into and abide with us, till Christ lives in us and we in Him. Come peace, come storm, through crucifixion, and unto glory everlasting, we trust to be His, and His alone, in the bosom of God.

Like mist before the rising sun, the Face of Christ banishes the dense veils which sin and weakness of the flesh have dropped before the soul's vision. Sometimes they melt away slowly, imperceptibly, while our eyes adapt themselves unconsciously to increasing glory, till we find ourselves walking, unstartled, in the luminous Presence of the veiled Majesty of God. And again, those veils become bright with a sudden piercing luster, as though the love of God could not brook delay. We awake to the world with a smile on our lips, and all things smile back on us with the new and heavenly loveliness in which they were created; and our soul cries: "Out of Sion the loveliness of His beauty, God shall come manifestly!"⁷

That indeed was the cry of the Old Testament Psalmist, but as repeated by us it is a prophecy already verified in the coming of Christ. So may we continue to walk in the light of that heavenly Vision of God, made manifest to us under the veils of human flesh.

"My heart hath said to Thee: 'Thy Face, O Lord, will I still seek.' "⁸

⁷ Ps. 49:2-3.

⁸ Ps. 26:8.

Yea, Lord, Thou knowest—we shall be able to say to Him—that my face hath sought Thee with a hunger which will not be appeased. As the flower toward the sun, so my face hath turned toward the glory of Thy countenance. I have lifted it up to Thee and Thou hast stooped to it, to touch and caress it, to breathe upon it the breath of Life and bless it with the benediction of Thy strengthening grace. Thou hast drenched it with “the dew of Heaven,” and it has known no storm too fierce to blast from it the joy of Thy countenance.

“I have found grace in Thy eyes, my Lord, Who hast comforted me, and hast spoken to my heart.”⁹

Only turn not Thy Face from me, and I shall follow Thee even unto prison and death. Except for the light of Thy countenance, I am helpless and blind. Lord, shine Thou upon me, that I may forever know but Thee, and all things in Thee.

But behind that Face of the newborn Babe in the crib is the Face foreseen by the Prophet, the Face of the Man of Sorrow. From the sight of that Face, bruised and buffeted, those lips athirst upon the cross, can we fail to draw a deep consuming zeal for souls!

“O adorable Face of Jesus!” so St. Thérèse began the Act of Consecration to the Holy Face which she composed for her novices in the Carmel, “since Thou hast deigned to choose our souls in order to give Thyselveto them in a special manner, we come to consecrate these souls to Thee.

“To us, O Jesus, it seems that Thou dost say: ‘Open to Me, My sisters, My spouses, for My face is wet with the dew, and My locks with the drops of the night.’¹⁰ Our

⁹ Ruth 2:13.

¹⁰ Cf. Cant. 5:2.

souls understand Thy language of love; we wish to wipe Thy sweet Face and to console Thee for the contempt of the wicked. In their eyes Thou art still 'as it were hidden . . . they esteem Thee an object of reproach.' . . .¹¹

"From Thy adorable lips we have heard that loving plaint: 'I thirst.' We know that this thirst which consumes Thee is a thirst for love. To quench it we fain would possess an infinite love.

"Dear Spouse of our souls, if we could love with the love of all hearts, that love would be all Thine. . . . Give us, O Lord, this love, and then come to satisfy in us Thy thirst.

"But give to us souls, dear Lord. We thirst for souls! And above all we thirst for the souls of apostles and martyrs that through them we may inflame with love for Thee all poor sinners.

"O adorable Face, we shall win this grace from Thee. Unmindful of our exile 'by the rivers of Babylon,' we shall sing for Thy ears the sweetest of melodies. Yet not in a strange land will our songs be sung, for in Thee is the true home of our souls.

"O beloved Face of Jesus, while we await that eternal day when we trust to gaze on Thy infinite glory, our only desire here shall be to delight Thy Divine eyes by keeping our faces hidden, too, so that no one shall recognize us upon earth.

"Dear Jesus, Heaven for us is Thy hidden Face."

* * *

But the Face beheld by the Prophet, which has touched our deepest chords of being, now melts away,

¹¹ Cf. Is. 53:3.

and what we look upon once more is the tender Face of the Babe, peacefully asleep in the manger-crib of Bethlehem. Strange as it may seem, these two thoughts are combined in the name of the world's little Carmelite saint, Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, and are the two emblems on her escutcheon of nobility in the registry of Heaven.

MOTHER AND WIFE

THE morning dawns. The Baby eyes of the Christ Child open for the first time to the glories of nature. From His Mother's arms He looks out with human vision upon the work of His eternal hands. The beauty of sky and field and wood and hill draws close to Him and thrills His heart, and the rough wind kisses His cheek as though He were not—God. The sun rests upon His face and dazzles Him till Mary folds the little Babe within the shelter of her veil, and the heaven of her eyes shuts out the Heaven of His Father which enfolds them both.

Tenderly the little Babe is laved and stroked, and then is warmed with Mary's kisses. His Divinity does not obscure from her His human loveliness.

Softly and with reverent hands she swathes the perfect limbs, and clothes the tender body, and lays His little face against her throat. Ah! the soft clinging of those tiny arms, the pressure of the tender cheek, the tender helplessness of the yielding form, and—the thought of the Divinity beneath it all that sends her soul in mute, unspeakable worship to the foot of the Eternal.

It is with His loveliness that Christ seeks to win our hearts before He conquers our intellects with His truth.

He comes to us first in all the tender, helpless fascination of a Babe. And when our whole being is inundated with the tide of overwhelming love, we suddenly see Him before us in all the majesty of Eternal Truth. Then the captivation of intellect proceeds; and He carries us from Alpine peak to Himalayan, while still beyond the ken of mortal sight rise in the heavens those cloud-encompassed pinnacles above whose crests shine forth forever the unveiled splendors of the Beatific Vision.

Does the soul tremble and quail with fear of the splendid awfulness, of the unapproachable Almightyness of God? If so, then that other vision of the little human Babe dawns once more, reassuringly, into the very altitude of spiritual vision.

How difficult, knowing her Babe was God, might it seem to have been for Mary to keep in mind His Will to be dependent upon His creature, not only for His mortal life, but for all His daily needs. Yet to Mary's mother-love all this was not so strange. It was but the word of God fulfilled in her regard. Her faith was perfect as her love, and her love was the crown of her faith. With the great dignity of her sublime Motherhood came likewise the grace she needed worthily to perform in every detail those functions, so slight in the eyes of the world, so wonderful in the sight of Heaven, which henceforth should be her hourly duty, as the Mother of God.

Tenderly, therefore, with a mother's sweetest care and intuition, Mary gathers the Babe in her arms and hushes His cries against her breast. The little mouth quivers into silence with the comfort of the warm sweet draught, and side by side with the mother-joy, in Mary dawns the

knowledge that every drop is nourishing that tiny body for the awful sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

If only she could shield Him ever in the warmth and shelter of her loving arms. Yet, no! It may not be. He has His mission to fulfill even to the *consummatum est*. Higher and higher, from the abyss of her noble heart, rises the tide of Mary's heroism in sublime correspondence with the Divine decree, until the great wave crests, and trembles, and breaks lovingly with the heaving breast of the Infant God.

Joseph, too, is to have his own high share in the sufferings of Jesus and of Mary. That is the inevitable price of his high privilege of nearness to the Redeemer of mankind. Supernatural understandings pass from Mary's eyes to his. Well may those loving hearts tremble with apprehension, perfectly conformed though they are to the Will of God, when they remember the Prophecies foretelling the Man of Sorrows, Whose Face shall be hidden and despised. But beneath their eyes the Babe now rests content, while the blended love of Mary and of Joseph broods above Him in the holy shadow of the Omnipotent.

* * *

From the stable to the modest home in Bethlehem the journey was safely made. Rumors of the angels' song on the lonely hills and of the shepherds' worship at the manger-cradle apparently did not reach the villagers, or else they did not associate them with Mary and her Child. So, quickly the days slipt by, centered in the sweet, pure light of the Infant life.

Mary may have struggled at times against the strange impression that possesses one under long periods of joy,

as if it were all a dream from which she shall be rudely awakened. Did Joseph surprise her, in holy moments, with a soft, perplexed smile upon her face, struggling with spiritual visions that hover upon the fringe of joy?

What a mystery it all is, her divine maternity, in the light of her unconquerable humility. That the Messias should come; that He should appear clothed in flesh and blood as had been promised and prophesied, all this she firmly believed, for her faith was ever ardent and pure. But what a mystery, that out of all the daughters of Israel, the fair and the noble, the powerful, the saintly and the royal of spirit, she should be the one chosen for this sublime lot. The sweet eyes droop, full of tender tears, to the Baby face, and all her wonder is resolved in love.

But there is much more for her to do. The hours of Mary's day are spent in the full and perfect performance of her domestic duties. Nor is it difficult for her to combine them all into one celestial harmony of prayer and contemplation that ceaselessly delights the Heart of God. Her husband's needs must be cared for as well as those of her Child, and the thought of Joseph is treasured in her heart with all the tenderness of the deepest and holiest wifely affection. Does he not hold toward her, in the outward actions of her day, the place of her Invisible Spouse, the Holy Spirit, and is he not for the Babe at her breast the protecting shadow of His Eternal Father?

So the long day passes, until with loving heart and eager hand the evening meal is prepared. Then, as the sun is sinking in the West, she takes the Child up from His crib and watches with Him for the return of her beloved spouse from the labors of the day.

The steps of Joseph hasten as the lovely vision breaks upon his view. For there, in the doorway is Mary standing, with the form of the Babe outlined beneath the shelter of her veil.

With reverence Joseph looks into the face of the little Maid, so truly his lawful wife, and at once eagerly questions her: "The Child?" With that smile of ineffable tenderness and divinest joy which ever gathers upon her lips at mention of her Babe, Mary smiles on him and lifts the veil for Joseph's hungry eyes.

Is it not his Child, too? For in no mere adoptive sense was Jesus given him, but within his own virginal marriage with Mary, intended by God for this one purpose: that therein might be conceived of her by the Holy Ghost the Incarnate Word of God. Every right and duty of the most perfect parenthood are his, and every affection of his heart answers to this demand. His fatherhood is only the more sublime in that it is purely virginal. Long and lovingly he looks upon the Child.

That vision is ever fresh, ever new, ever ecstatic to the holy souls of Mary and Joseph. When we seek the light of God's countenance in moments of rest and leisure, do we not always find it restful and adorable? How difficult then to withdraw our gaze once more into the shadows and darkness of material things! . . . May Mary's hand, some day, lift for us the shimmering, impalpable veil of faith, from the full splendor of the Beatific Vision.

As night falls and Joseph still keeps faithful vigil near the Mother and her sleeping Child, his great heart at times grows heavy with the pain and burden of his love, till his eyes overflow. In mute supplication he raises them to the throne of Yahweh in the might of

whose arm alone is strength and refuge. He has no wish, no will but God's. He trusts blindly and with unshakable faith in the guidance of the Almighty Father. His soul is ever in an attitude of sleepless attention to the voice of God: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." And in his heart he knows that his cherished ones are safe, for beneath his own weak strength are "the everlasting arms."

Softly rising, he lays his hand upon the bowed head of his spouse, and quickly Mary looks up into his face with her own sweet confiding smile. She reaches out her hand to him, and together they kneel by the side of the tiny form reposing in the cradle, their God and their Creator.

There, as they feed their souls upon the beauty of that Babe, their hearts are drawn closer to each other in resistless sympathy, and when at last by mutual impulse they look into each other's eyes, it is with that perfect understanding of the souls of the elect united in the holy bonds of purest love of God.

Here Heaven has descended to earth. God has found His perfect worshipers. Though the Baby lids are closed, the Divine Heart feeds with delight "among the lilies."

9

THE CIRCUMCISION

EIGHT days after birth, according to the Mosaic Dispensation, followed the Circumcision of the Christ Child. It was a ceremony that might take place in any private dwelling, as well as in the synagogue, and at that period was usually performed by the head of the family.

The significance of corporal circumcision was to indicate the need of a purification of the heart. At the same time the child became a member of the people of God.

Although not subject to this prescription, Christ willingly submitted to it that so He might emphasize the sanctity of the Old Law, give an example of humility and obedience, and make evident from the first the price at which our Redemption would be purchased. Had He not come to take upon Himself the sins of all the world? In the strong words of the Apostle, was He not to become sin itself for us, that by His stripes we might be healed?

Moreover, Christ's capability of suffering in His human flesh was at once made manifest in this Mystery of His love, wherein the first drops of the Divine Blood were shed. It was the red dawning reflected in the morning sky of His Infancy, presaging a bloody consummation for the day that was to end with the tragedy of Calvary.

With full consciousness of all that was passing on about Him, the Incarnate Word wished to feel, as no other ever could, the actual realization of infant helplessness in its first experience of acute suffering, and to undergo human nature's inevitable shrinking from pain. Followed the quick agony of the delicate, sensitive nerves; the sudden contraction of the heart; and withal the instant lifting of the human soul to the Eternal Father. Such are the circumstances of the Mystery. But over all and through it, there is the victorious submission of the human will to the Divine, and the solemn breaking of holy joy across the portals of the great sacrifice.

"And after eight days were accomplished," St. Luke says, "that the Child should be circumcised, His name was called *Jesus*, which was called by the angel, before He was conceived in the womb."¹

Note well the stress placed on that Sacred Name.

Already in the Mystery of the Annunciation the Divine Name has been made known to Mary by which she should call her Child. "Behold," the angel said, "thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son; *and thou shalt call His name Jesus.*"²

On Joseph no less the obligation of conferring the same sacred Name was placed, at the very moment when the Incarnation was revealed to him and he was bidden to take into his home Mary his wife: "For that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a Son: *and thou shalt call His name Jesus.*"³

The giving of a name was a parental privilege and duty. The angel's command to Joseph gives clearest

¹ Luke 2:21.

² Luke 1:31.

³ Matt. 1:20-21.

evidence that he possessed parental rights in common with Mary. In both instances identical words are used. Joseph, therefore, was to be "Father" of Jesus, not carnally indeed, but spiritually and in all reality. Of all paternities, excepting that of the Eternal Father, his was the most sublime precisely because of the fact that it was virginal.

There is but one Virginal Father, St. Augustine beautifully says, as there is but one Virginal Mother. And the bond of love between these two is the Holy Ghost. Nor does the great Doctor of the Church tire of impressing on us the truth that Joseph is all the more father of Jesus in that he is father, not according to the flesh, but in a mystic sense, spiritually and virginally.

Joseph's paternity was regarded in four ways:

In the eyes of the law, he was the rightful legal father of Jesus as he was the legal husband of Mary, his wife. It was a correct view.

In the eyes of his townsmen, unacquainted with the secret of the Holy Ghost, he was simply the father of Christ: "Is not this Jesus, the Son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?"⁴ This, of course, was incorrect. It shows how carefully the virginal conception of Mary had been guarded by Joseph from all suspicion.

In the eyes of Mary and of Jesus, he was the shadow and created image of the Eternal Father, Whose Divine Authority was made visible to them through the fatherhood of Joseph. God's Paternity found in him its earthly representative, and according to this high prerogative they honored him.

Lastly, in the eyes of the Most Blessed Trinity, he

⁴ John 6:42.

was the sole, authoritatively constituted and divinely recognized head of the Holy Family. Not to Jesus, not to Mary, but to Joseph alone were sent from the Throne of God the celestial messages which revealed the Divine Will concerning the measures to be taken for the safety of his Family. Thus it was to Joseph that the angel appeared and said: "Arise, and take the Child and His mother, and fly into Egypt: and be there until I shall tell thee."⁵

In a natural way it was the duty of Joseph to provide for the Divine Child, to feed and clothe Him, and no less to save Him from His enemies. Also, in his own distinctive way, he was to take an active part in the work of the Redemption, since with Mary he prepared the Divine Victim to be offered up for the sins of mankind. Hence the fitness that he should join with Mary in bestowing upon the Child that name of Jesus, meaning "Saviour." In this privilege is hidden a supreme significance.

"Son of David," the angel had hailed Joseph, thus solemnly indicating that in the virginal conception of Christ was contained, as in its germ, the fulfilment of the promises made to David.

But to realize the joy which that blessed Name gave to Jesus Himself, we must understand how for Him it summarized His entire redemptive mission here on earth. He came to save. Who could comprehend, when this Name was conferred on Him, all the oceans of sweetness and consolation it was destined to pour into the aching wounds of His creatures, the strength it would impart, the victories over sin and temptation it would secure, the power it implied to raise the fallen

⁵ Matt. 2:13.

soul from ignominy and lift up the saint to the portals of Heaven? Who would know about the endless harmonies its utterance would evoke in the heavenly choirs?

In the Divine Mind that Name rings out above the music of creation. From the clear note of the lark, the voice of the wind, the rush of the storm, the thunder of the waves, the whisper of the forest, on through all the wondrous gamut of the harpstrings of the soul of man and the celestial choirings, the sweet Name of Jesus trembles with its potent spell and ever-deepening revelations of Eternal Truth. Entranced by its "nectareal fragrancy" the poet exclaims:

Sweet name, in Thy each syllable
A thousand blest Arabias dwell!⁶

To him who listens at the heart of things, and whose soul by God's gift is filled with the crystal light of faith, the potency of that Name will be made still more clear: "In the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in Heaven, on earth, and under the earth."⁷

There is no mistake from the first as to the future division among men. There will be those who accept and those who reject all that is implied in that sacred name of Jesus, "Saviour." No one, of course, who in good faith lives according to the light that is granted him will ever be lost. But the struggle between light and darkness still goes on. Vividly it is summed up by St. John in regard to Christ's coming into this world:

"He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His

⁶ Richard Crashaw, "To the Name above Every Name, the Name of Jesus."

⁷ Phil. 2:10.

own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, He gave them the power to be made the sons of God, *to them that believe in His name*, who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”⁸

⁸ John 1:10-13.

PURIFICATION AND PRESENTATION

THE Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple took place at one and the same time.

In the Mosaic Dispensation, a woman giving birth to a male child was considered legally unclean for forty days. She might not touch anything holy, neither might she be permitted to enter the sanctuary "until the days of her purification be fulfilled."¹

When that time had expired, according to the Book of Leviticus, she was to bring to the door of the Tabernacle of the Testimony a year old lamb as a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtle dove for a sin offering.

In case of poverty, "if her hand find not sufficiency," she might substitute for the lamb another turtle dove or pigeon. Her offering, then, would consist of two turtle doves or pigeons, which was precisely the offering Joseph and Mary brought, the offering of the poor. "And the priest shall pray for her, and so she shall be cleansed."²

How this ritual was carried out in the case of Mary and her Child is thus narrated by St. Luke:

¹ Lev. 12:2-4.

² Ibid. 6-8.

"And after the days of her purification, according to the law of Moses, were accomplished, they carried Him to Jerusalem, to present Him to the Lord: as it is written in the law of the Lord: 'Every male opening the womb shall be called holy to the Lord': and to offer a sacrifice, according as it is written in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons."³

To understand this rite more fully we must go back to the days of the captivity in Egypt. The Jewish first-born was there preserved by God from the death that befell every other firstborn in Egypt during the last and most terrible of the plagues sent in punishment upon the land. "And every firstborn in the land of the Egyptians shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sitteth on his throne, even to the firstborn of the hand-maid that is at the mill."⁴ Ruler and people had jointly participated in the persecution of the children of Israel, and together they were afflicted by God.

From that time on the firstborn sons of the Jews were to be considered sacred to the Lord: "Sanctify to Me every firstborn that openeth the womb among the children of Israel."⁵ But since the tribe of Levi was singled out by God to serve Him in the Temple, the firstborn of the other tribes were to be redeemed by a small payment of five shekels in lieu of temple service. Such initially was the law.

But neither purification of the mother nor presentation of the firstborn were laws that could apply to Mary and her Child. Uncleanliness, legal or otherwise, could not so much as be mentioned in connection with Mary,

³ Luke 2:22-24.

⁴ Ex. 11:5.

⁵ Ibid. 13:2.

while Christ was Himself the "High Priest and Temple of the New Law."⁶

For nine months Mary housed within her breast the God of Sion: "Wisdom hath built herself a house."⁷ She was the chosen dwelling place of Divine Wisdom, the Word Incarnate. Nine months her virginal body had been the marvelous tabernacle of the Most High, where dwelt the mighty Trinity in mystic unity within her stainless soul, grace upon grace steeping and enriching it with beauty and casting about it the glory of the Uncreated Light.

She who by the law, misapplied in her case, might not touch any holy thing was even now holding to her heart Infinite Purity and Holiness Itself. She who might not be permitted to enter the Temple gates had brought into the world by an ineffable and miraculous childbirth the Master of the Temple. That Temple from which she was excluded was not more holy in all the splendor of its worship than the Cave of Bethlehem where with Joseph and the shepherds she had knelt before the Crib of Christ in the midst of adoring angels.

Under the garment of her imputed "uncleanness," the Immaculate Virgin Mother remained silent. The respect of her fellow beings and the honor of her Divine Son were justly dear to her soul, and yet the real glory of her Divine Maternity would even in the future be denied her in the hearts of many of her own race. For all this, no word of her own exaltation at the hand of God, no echo of her *Magnificat*, would break the portentous silence of her lips.

Mary's humiliation, in the shadow of which she

⁶ Father Maas, S.J.

⁷ Prov. 9:1.

walked the streets of Jerusalem, was really not regarded by herself at all, but only for her Child.

He the All Holy; she the all pure.

It pertains to the glory of her Divine Son, what is a triple article of Faith, that Mary remained a virgin in the conception of Christ, in the birth of Christ, and thereafter until her death. In the words of Ezechiel, already quoted, she was that sealed gate of the Lord God of Israel which was forever to remain unopened.⁸ She herself had indicated clearly her intent of perpetual virginity when to the Angel of the Annunciation she replied: "How shall this be done because I know not man?"⁹

Nothing could be more foreign to the Christian mind than even the whisper of a suggestion that other children in the flesh could have been born to Mary. The Gospel expression, "brethren of Christ," implied no more in Hebrew than with us the word "relations." The simple reason is that no Hebrew word existed that could have been used as the equivalent of our English word "cousins." Instead, the expressions "brothers" and "sisters" were employed in a larger sense. In perfect illustration of this, James the Less is named "the brother of the Lord," yet we definitely know him to have been the son of Cleophas and another Mary.

Some take objection from the Scripture reference to Joseph regarding his marital virginity with Mary, where we read: "He knew her not until she brought forth her first-born son."¹⁰ But this, in the Hebrew idiom, carries with it no suggestion that he ever "knew her" afterwards. Again, the word "first-born," both in the Old and the New Testament, was used for any *only* child

⁸ Ez. 44:2.

⁹ Luke 1:34.

¹⁰ Matt. 1:25.

as well as for the first child of a group. Legally and in general usage an only child was always designated as "the first-born."

If Mary remained silent amid humiliation, not so the voice of her Divine Bridegroom, the Holy Spirit of God, Who by the tongues of others, inspired by Him, proclaimed aloud the glories of Mary's Divine Son, and therewithal her own exaltation.

Long had Simeon's saintly soul awaited the "consolation of Israel." Just and devout, he had received from the Holy Ghost the assurance that he should not see death before he had looked upon the face of Christ the Lord. Divinely impelled, he came into the Temple at this very moment, and taking up the Child in his aged hands, blessed God and said:

Now Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord,
According to Thy word in peace:

Because my eyes have seen Thy salvation,
Which Thou hast prepared before the face of
all peoples:

A light to the revelation of the Gentiles,
And the glory of Thy people Israel.¹¹

Peace, salvation, light and glory! All these blessings was that Child to bring. His "father and mother" themselves, in the Scripture words, were filled with admiration "at those things which were spoken concerning Him."¹²

It is but one of the many places where the endearing word, "father" or "parent," is applied to Joseph. *Legally*,

¹¹ Luke 2:29-32.

¹² Ibid. 2:33.

in fact, he was the father of Jesus, while Jesus Himself loved and obeyed him with all a child's tenderness.

Now, after long years of supplication from His chosen nation, the Messias has at length arrived. Here, in the Temple built for His glory, from the throne of Mary's heart, He lays His life at the feet of His Heavenly Father. Here He offers Himself anew for His future ministry and for His own precious death on the Cross, even to the piercing of His Heart by the soldier's spear.

But Mary's heart is to be pierced as well. The eyes of Simeon, raised for the time to God as he pronounces His Messianic Canticle, fall on Joseph and Mary. Blessing them both he turns to Mary and solemnly addresses to her the words of prophecy with which God inspired him:

"Behold this Child is set for the fall, and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted; and thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed."¹³

The future tragedy of her life, already sufficiently anticipated, was now more definitely revealed. In silence she accepted God's will, in silence she waited, her quivering lips nested, mother-wise, in the tiny palm of her Heavenly Child.

How He loved Mary! And how He loved the great-hearted Joseph who was bringing this sacrifice with her!

The Mystery of the Presentation is, in a way, St. Joseph's Calvary. He was not to live until the great Sacrifice itself should be completed, but he was here making the oblation of it in his heart. He was presenting to the Eternal Father the Son Who was loved by him as never any other son should be loved by human

¹³ Ibid. 2:34-35.

father, the Son immeasurably dear as the twofold gift of Mary and the Holy Ghost. The Scripture makes so clear his own participation in this Mystery.

But before Joseph and Mary take their departure from the Temple one more event occurred. On the majestic scene suddenly entered Anna, daughter of Phanuel, widow and prophetess. Fourscore and four years of age, by fasting and prayer, night and day, she still continued her temple-service. She, too, was moved by the Spirit of God, "and coming in, confessed to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all that looked for the redemption of Israel."¹⁴

Both sexes now, in venerated age and holiness, as if impersonating in themselves the long centuries of waiting and expectation, have given testimony to the Lord. In a placid glow of glory the Temple Drama has reached its end. With wonderment still in their eyes Joseph and Mary faced together the return to Nazareth.

"And after they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their city, Nazareth."¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid. 38. It is meant to be spoken in Anna's praise that after having "lived with her husband seven years from her virginity," she was not wedded to another after his death, but served God in the Temple, where women were engaged, besides the priests and levites.

¹⁵ Ibid. 39.

11

THE MAGI

THE Holy Family returned to Nazareth, but the Scripture does not say that they did so immediately. Joseph had to face the possible suspicion of the Nazarenes for the fact that the birth of Christ had taken place only five months after the public marriage. An alternative would have been to journey back to Bethlehem and remain there for a time.

The stay at Nazareth, which at all events followed the Mysteries of the Purification and the Presentation, may have been intended merely to make preparations there for a permanent settlement in Bethlehem.

Certain it is that from Nazareth Joseph again took the Holy Family back to Bethlehem.

Bethlehem was the city of David, and the Angel had clearly announced to Mary that her Divine Son should occupy the throne of David: "The Lord God shall give to Him the throne of David His Father."¹ That of course was to be understood of the spiritual Kingdom which Christ had come to found, His Holy Church. But what would seem more natural than for Joseph to transfer in consequence his residence to Bethlehem as the ancestral city both of himself and Mary, so that Christ might begin His mission there?

¹ Luke 1:32.

At all events, Joseph allowed himself to be led entirely by the Holy Spirit, for it is here in Bethlehem that the wise men were to find the Saviour Whose star had appeared in the East. It was here also that the prophecy of Rachel bemoaning the loss of her children was to be fulfilled, little as Joseph could possibly have thought then of those things which God held in store. Soon enough all this was to take place, when following the visit of the wise men the blood of children and the tears of wailing mothers were to moisten the hill beneath which the body of Rachel lay buried.

To Bethlehem, therefore, Joseph came again, in perfect obedience to the least breathing of the Holy Spirit, and there, as God's Providence had directed, took place the Mystery of the Epiphany, or Christ's "Manifestation" to the Gentiles. They were our own representatives, these Wise Men who came from countries known, in Jerusalem, as the "East," from ancient Chaldaea, from fire-worshiping Persia, from Arabia Petraea, or from the wide plains of Mesopotamia. Scripture does not say how many they were. The number "three" might readily have been suggested by the three gifts they brought.

These brave and devout men, as St. Augustine says, were the first fruits of that Gentile Church whereof we are the harvest. From their loyal worship of the King-God-Redeemer, throned upon the arms of Mary, dates our own entry, as part of the vast Gentile world, into the heirship of God and the co-heirship with Christ. So the Church beautifully teaches in her office for the Feast of the Epiphany commemorating this wonderful event.

It is the Gentile Christmas, since now for the first

time was Christ made manifest to Gentile eyes and from Gentile hands received the threefold offering that so perfectly betokens, in Oriental symbolism, His nature and His sacred functions.

It was most fitting that a star should guide these first Gentiles in their search for Christ, since it was the Gentile Prophet Balaam who, under the inspiration of the true God, made that great prediction: "A star shall rise out of Jacob."²

The remarkable events are recorded by St. Matthew: "When Jesus, therefore, was born in Bethlehem of Juda, in the days of King Herod, behold, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying: 'Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East, and are come to adore Him.'

"And King Herod, hearing this, was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And assembling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where Christ should be born. But they said to him: 'In Bethlehem of Juda. For so it is written by the Prophet: 'And thou Bethlehem the land of Juda art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come forth the Captain That shall rule my people Israel.'

"Then Herod, privately calling the wise men, learned diligently of them the time of the star which appeared to them; and sending them into Bethlehem, said: 'Go and diligently inquire after the Child, and when you have found Him, bring me word again, that I also may come and adore Him.' Who, having heard the king, went their way.

"And behold the star which they had seen in the East,

² Num. 24:17.

went before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. And seeing the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And entering into the house, they found the Child with Mary His mother, and falling down they adored Him: and opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh.”⁸

It was the star that led them.

Unknown on earth, St. Augustine moralizes, Christ is recognized in the heavens. His greatness and His lowliness are alike made manifest in these events: His greatness in the star, His lowliness in the form of the tiny Babe.

No insignia of royalty adorn the brow of the Infant King, as the Magi kneel before Him and lay their gifts at His Mother's feet. More impressive than any imagining is the simplicity of that scene: the humble home in which the Holy Family has taken up abode; the radiant beauty of the star as it hangs luminously over it and points downward, like the finger of God, to the Mystery within; and “the Child with His Mother,” and the Wise Men from afar, princes perhaps of their people, falling down to adore Him and offer their gifts.

The gifts themselves, mystical and symbolical, are variously and yet consistently interpreted. Gold, as a truly royal present, is brought to Christ as King. Frankincense is an offering befitting God alone, in Whose honor it is consumed in the flame. Hence, it symbolizes not only the Godhead of Christ Who receives it, but also His sacrificial and mediatorial function as the Great High Priest. Myrrh is for burial, and indicates the mortal nature Christ has assumed, His manhood, and thus also His function as Redeemer which

⁸ Matt. 2:1-11.

this nature makes possible, since it enables Him to die for us.

"Let us present gold unto the new-born Lord," Pope Gregory the Great wrote, "acknowledging His universal Kingship; let us also offer unto Him frankincense, confessing that He Who has been made manifest unto us in time, is God before time was; let us give unto Him myrrh, believing that He Who could not suffer as regards His Godhead was made capable of death as regards His manhood, which He shareth with us."⁴

The homage which we offer Him is the joyous oblation of the precious gold of our loyalty and love, the ever-ascending frankincense of our prayers, and lastly the myrrh of our mortifications and the sweet-scented little sacrifices we gladly make for Him throughout our daily life of praise, and reverence, and service. The life of the true Christian is a daily dying with Christ, that he may also live and reign with Him forever.

We need the fearlessness, persistency, and singleness of purpose which characterized these Wise Men.

Although the star ceased to shine for them, they did not give up their search. Regardless of looks of amazement which greeted their questionings at Herod's court; regardless of the jealousy of the king, the fear and suspicion of his subjects, or even the deaths which threatened them from this notorious royal murderer, they continued unshaken on their way. The light appeared again, led them onward, and at last "came and stood over where the Child was." Brought to their journey's end, "they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."

In our own trials, we may rest assured of God's safe guidance, even though His light may seem to have

⁴ Hom. 10 in Evang.

ceased to shine. It is then that in very fact His love watches over us with greatest solicitude. We see Him not, but He will not lose sight of us, and will safely guide us in the way, provided we trustingly confide in Him and perseveringly go on in faith, and hope, and love.

Familiar with the splendors of their eastern culture and the natural glories of their native land, endowed with the brilliancy of their own intellectual attainments, looking no doubt for a purer faith than expressed in the idolatrous excesses of their own people, the Magi opened wide their souls to the light of Truth, and went forth unquestioningly, whithersoever it would lead. Nor were they daunted when it brought them to the poverty and obscurity chosen for Himself by the Lord of lords and the King of kings. At once the enlightened love of their great hearts clothed Him in the glory He seeks upon earth, and raised Him to His rightful throne.

The Magi, in humility, interpreted correctly where the Jews, blind and arrogant, were led astray. Humility is indeed a shining light, the only light to clarify the darkness of the heart and the distant horizons of the intellect, for it teaches us patience, and perseverance, and earnestness in the search of Truth.

But as the princely visitors retired at night to rest, the visage of King Herod, dark and sinister, arose before their minds. They recalled his hypocritical request, asking them to return and bring report of the new-born King, that he too might come and worship Him. What were they to do? Earnestly they prayed for light, and with firm trust in God's Providence, consigned themselves to sleep. That very night, guidance was clearly

given them, for the Scripture says: "And having received an answer in sleep that they should not return to Herod, they went back another way into their country."⁵

Quickly they rose, and over the winding road that led into the open desert their line of camels sped along. Faint clouds of dust arose and then dissolved in the very silence of the night. No more was seen of them; no more was heard of them at Herod's court.

Henceforth the law of love alone would rule these Gentile hearts. In exchange for gold, frankincense, and myrrh, they carried forth with them an imperishable treasure of Divine Love, and an incense of sweetness that should rise in luminous faith and odorous worship from their loyal hearts, even in distant lands.

But neither would their memory pass away on earth, for through all future centuries the Church will look to them as the first fruits of the Gentile world, and all its generations to come shall acknowledge in the miraculous call of these few souls their own vocation to the Faith.

Rightly has Epiphany been called "the Christmas of the Gentiles."

⁵ Matt. 2:12.

12

FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

LAI^D away were the mystic gifts of the Wise Men from the East, but silently Mary ponders on their meaning.

Gold for Christ's Kingship, frankincense for His Godhead, and—myrrh?

Myrrh for His mortal nature, for His death and burial. Myrrh meant trials, tears, testings of all the powers of her heart and soul.

But only thus, in God's design, was the Redemption possible. Had not the Prophets long ago foretold it? Mary understood. She must be strong. She must trust Him to support her in the future sacrifice. Back to her mind with striking vividness come the words of Holy Simeon: "And thy own soul a sword shall pierce."¹

Was she not, too, with her Divine Son, a Predestinated Victim? Little did Mary know at that moment, however, how soon she should feel again the sacrificial sword which at last would pierce her through in the unbloody martyrdom of her mother's heart on Calvary. Come what may, she would accept with love all things, bitter and sweet, from the hands of God. His Holy Will be done, in small things and in great, in life and, yes, in death.

¹ Luke 2:35.

With a mingling of happy and foreboding thoughts, with gratitude, and with a prayer for help in her human feebleness, Mary quietly falls asleep by the cradle-bed.

Suddenly and in haste, a tender hand is laid upon the little sleeping Virgin. It is the strong and loving hand of Joseph.

"Mary!" His voice is familiar to her ears, but there is something strange, alarming, in its sound.

The young eyes open.

How heavy is the sleep of youth. But in Joseph's face Mary reads with all a mother's intuition the dire presence of danger for her Child. From Herod, possibly. Of herself she does not think. But mother-love is up in arms. There is no time for lengthy explanation. A few words from the pale lips of Joseph are enough.

Tense as a strained bow to its arrow, her heart has but one question: "Whither?"

Ah, God knows. Egypt indeed is to be the end of that journey—but by what paths and to what destined home?

Hardly, it would seem, had the Magi departed in the night, when God's Angel brought his new message to Joseph in his sleep:

"Arise, and take the Child and His mother, and fly into Egypt, and be there until I shall tell thee. For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the Child to destroy Him."²

Quickly the Infant is kissed and pressed to Mary's bosom. From the soft, untroubled form of the sleeping Child, peace and the strength of God creep together to her breast, and swiftly Mary follows as Joseph bids.

To him alone, as head of the Holy Family, does

² Matt. 2:13.

Heaven issue orders. What father ever so faithful as he? It is God's way of teaching, for all time, the headship of the father in a family. What matter that Jesus and Mary are greater than he; their obedience is rendered faithfully to him, as he in turn knows no other purpose than to carry out in their regard, as well as in his own, the Will of Heaven. In the hour of trial, each is a support to the other in a mutual love that is unselfish and sublime.

"Who arose," the Scripture says simply, "and took the Child and His mother by night, and retired into Egypt: and he was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the Prophet, saying: 'Out of Egypt have I called My Son.' "³

Though in years no more than a delicate girl, Mary is already drinking the deep draughts of womanhood. The child of her is fading before the sternness of life. New forces are at work within her. They spring into instant action at the imperative call of every fresh event in her consecrated existence. In each call she hears the muffled music of the voice of God. It strikes familiarly with a haunting sweetness, and instills into her soul the strength of enduring heroism.

Mary casts one look about the little home which has grown inexpressibly dear as the latest sanctuary of the new-born Christ, and for the moment unbidden tears fall in rainbow shower across her brave but tremulous smile. Quickly, a last touch to straighten out the little room, while Joseph places under the fold of his mantle the mystic gift of gold offered by the Magi. It was not meant as a dower of wealth, but merely as a symbol of the great truth their devout hearts sought to express.

³ *Ibid.* 14-15.

God's Love had provided it to serve yet another purpose in the life of Christ.

With the Child folded in the warmth of her breast, Mary stands waiting upon the threshold of exile, the stars of her eyes raised to the stars of Egypt, with the steadfast luster of the new grace of sacrifice in their depths.

Though strengthened by the words of the Angelic messenger, yet Joseph trembles as he searches the frail, flower-like beauty of Mary's face. How will she stand the trial, the fear, the terror of pursuit, the danger and hardships of the journey, the dread of the unknown in the land of exile? But the spirit of God rests upon her face as the dew rests in the heart of a flower; and Joseph loves it, worships it, and smiles into it with the royal smile of an inspired prophet and patriarch. Gently he draws her to the sanctuary of his great heart, and she pours into it the sweetness and beauty of her own exceeding grace wherewith to sweeten the bitter waters of exile.

The stars shine forth and crown them both with glory, and spell for them the Name of God across the midnight sky.

Out into the silence and loneliness of the night they fare, under the menacing shadow of Herod's uplifted arm. Through the quiet streets of Bethlehem they pass and on into the wilderness beyond. Before them lies a journey of many days that will try all the heroism and boundless faith of Joseph's loyal heart.

But scarcely have they left the sleeping village, when news is brought to Herod of the far more conspicuous leaving of the Magi. Jerusalem is but five miles distant from Bethlehem, and in raving fury the King at once

gives orders for a deed that makes our blood run cold:

"Then Herod, perceiving that he was deluded by the Wise Men, was exceeding angry: and sending killed all the men children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the borders thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the Wise Men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremias the Prophet, saying: 'A voice in Rama was heard, lamentation and great mourning; Rachel bewailing her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.' "⁴

That little attention was paid to this crime by the world at large is no wonder. The enormities committed by Herod were but commonplaces. Shortly before his own death, which was soon to follow, he was to murder his own son and heir who had expressed some satisfaction at the prospect of attaining to the throne. Herod later ordered the cold-blooded slaying of a number of prominent Jews, as if to provide some mourning on the occasion of his death if not because of it. Small heed, then, would be given to the cruel butchery of perhaps a dozen innocents in a tiny Jewish village.

But inexpressibly dear to the Babe at Mary's heart were those little ones and their lamenting mothers, and royally would He recompense them for the first martyr blood poured out because of Him. From the secrecy of Mary's sheltering veil went forth His bitter cry: "My little brothers!"

Every pang of those tiny bodies, every anguish of the mothers' hearts was driven into His quivering breast and lifted in the chalice of His Redeeming Love to the very Throne of the Father in Heaven.

⁴ Matt. 2:16-18.

Can any suffering equal that which, in conformity with His inscrutable designs, He Himself knew in the pain inflicted on the innocent and helpless lambs of His flock—He Who notes the fall of a sparrow, Who stoops to comfort the sorrow of a child, Who loads the Cross for us with the unearthly joys of suffering and sacrifice? His own child Heart was most cruelly pierced by the two-edged sword of that reign of terror; into It were gathered all the bitterness, suffering, and agony of both mothers and children.

But now, in all earnest, begins that long and toilsome journey into the land of Egypt.

Did the little human mind of the God-Man find it strange to adapt itself to time and space; to weather, hunger, and fatigue; to the heat of day and the cold of unsheltered nights? The sun broke and the winds blew and the rain beat across the *little face of God* that in the flesh He might know these elemental things, of which He would speak later in parables to drive home the more effectively the truths of His Gospel.

13

IN THE DESERT WITH GOD

SILENCE lays its spell upon the Holy Family. They have passed in safety beyond the jurisdiction of Herod, beyond the hills of Juda and the waters of the Nachal Misrayim, and Egypt, with its blazing skies and spiritual darkness, its wealth of Jewish memories and dearth of Jewish power, lies ahead across the sandy wastes.

In the Father's Providence for His Only-Begotten Son the dangers of the desert have for a time replaced the dangers that come from man! Both are held in control by His Almighty Hand. He tempers the wind and sun; He tames the tempest and the wild beast; and He suffers the malice of mortals to rage in impotent fury against His everlasting designs.

The charm of the Christ Child rests upon the desert, till legends blossom about His tiny feet of wild beasts crouching submissive to His smile and standing sentinel to the Son of God.

At times, as day breaks across the golden wastes, Joseph watches the glory of God drift across the face of the sleeping Child. The new and eternal wonder of his holy guardianship broods like the deepening flush of the morning on the placid waters of his soul. As glory grows in the face of the Child, still more in Joseph grows a mighty confidence in Its underlying power, till

the dangers of the desert and the dangers from man sink to utter insignificance and are lost in the sweet security of that entralling face.

How uninterrupted must have been His spiritual communications to Mary and Joseph. Scripture says nothing, leaving it to the heart that knows and loves God, that is acquainted with His ways, and has learned the spiritual science of patient, attentive listening, to fill in the silence with the wisdom of His speech. Yet what a crown-jewel of all the delights prepared for chosen hearts must be a knowledge of the hidden life of Mary.

There are pictures of the desert which give impressions of unbroken simplicity of feature, exquisitely luminous purity of atmosphere, a breathless stillness, in which the smoke of the isolated camp fire rises heavenward with the straightness of a silver needle. Overhead is a cloudless dome of a blue as intense as the velvet texture of the robe of God.

How typical of the united life of the Holy Family. Simplicity of motive; the luminous purity of spiritual atmosphere; silence in which the Word of God unfolds; the fire of love which glows in the bosom of the desert and sends its incense straight to the Throne of God—and over all, His perpetual presence.

More and more intimate to us these holy lives become in the silence and loneliness of the desert.

It is always difficult to be rid of the idea that the presence of the multitude is an impediment to perfect communication with Christ. There is an exulting sense of freedom in pacing the lonely sands with Mary and Joseph, and gazing full and long at the Child in His Mother's arms.

Who could better interpret Him than Mary and Joseph? Joseph, in all the direct simplicity of his unwavering faith, whose strong incentive is the helplessness of Incarnate Divinity, and Mary, who dreams the dreams of Jesus as He sleeps upon her heart, who reads the visions in His upraised eyes, who knows with the intuition of Divine Maternity the fair unfolding territory of His human Baby-soul.

Alone with the two human beings He loved best, how hard for the Word made flesh to keep Divinity locked within. How hard for the Baby-lips to lie so close to Mary's ear and guard the mystery of God's unmeasured Love. Yet what do they not tell her of the love of the Creator God. No wonder Mary's love for the whole human race took fire from the beseeching pressure of those Baby-lips.

All day long the voiceless desert has looked up to the sun, and now once more the night sinks cloudless and serene. The great stars leap into their places and thrill the silence with their light.

"And the stars have given light in their watches, and rejoiced," the Prophet wrote. "They were called, and they said: 'Here we are'; and with cheerfulness they have shined forth to Him that made them."¹

In the warm bosom of the desert lies the Child Christ, the immensity of God stretched out above and beneath Him in the speechless waste—Himself but an atom, it would seem, in His own creation.

Upon His tiny ear falls the music of the spheres; into His upturned eyes gleams the soft fire of their restless light. The wee sweet fingers of the rosy hand fold and unfold upon the eternal Power which guides the

¹ Bar. 3:34-35.

constellations in their courses and draws forth from them the music and the light to glorify His Name.

All inscrutable, within the shadow of the flesh, lies the hidden Godhead. Soft fingers tremble and relax. To the outward eye, all power is fled. Prone upon the warm sand the weightless hand falls back—a stray rose leaf in the vast waste of the desert—and the mighty wind creeps into its shelter and there silently falls asleep.

We have been in the desert with Christ. The trials of life have encompassed us. Dryness and desolation have taken hold of us. But as long as we have clung to Him, all has been well.

O, the goodness and the providence of God! He sends us into the desert, yet He Himself leads the way across its arid sands. Is it really the waste, the desolation, the dread monotony that our hearts have pictured? Whichever is the living God, there also is abundant life—teeming life, life which little by little touches our dulled senses, our numbed heart, our leaden soul, until our former years look poor and barren against the wealth of hard-won victory. When God is with us all things are noble and worthwhile. He is the *raison d'être* of our life and all that it entails. Come weal or woe, tempest or peace, once more we are content.

Before we were driven with God into the desert the strength and soundness of our whole spiritual life were more or less matters of speculation. Fundamental principles, doctrines, articles of faith—yes, of course, we accepted all of them without question. But how much for granted did we take them? How deep was our understanding? How strong our grasp? Was it deep and strong enough to carry us beyond the foundation to the delicate superstructure of the spiritual life?

Came the time to put us to the test. So the storm broke. God poured upon us His abundant graces; daily He fortified our soul; He lived close to us, touched us, spoke to us, lifted veil after veil of His unspeakable love and beauty. He won us as only God can win, the lutanist that charmeth divinely. And then, to reveal us to ourselves, to enable us to gauge the real worth of our love, He put us further to the proof, that we might have the securer knowledge of experience, and find confidence and courage for higher flights.

Now we are weary and bruised and sore, but no longer timid and afraid. We trust in God, and in ourselves no longer. We have weathered the storm and felt the touch of His sustaining Hand. Its invincibility, Its immutability, abide with us as a living Presence and fill us with the certainty of a Divine promise for the future. We need but trust, and love, obey, knowing that beyond the limit of our purely human strength lies His unbounded power. Good reason have we to thank God for the desert, rejoicing in our thanksgiving as the Apostle bids us.

There is often a grievous bitterness in the trials and afflictions that the world imposes, but let us find therein the Hand of God, the secret action of His Providence, and our heart will rise exultant upon its hymn of praise: "Blessed be God; blessed be His Holy Name!" The closer, the more faithfully we begin to look about for the innumerable manifestations of His love which follow every labored footstep across the waste of sand, the more we shall behold the desert blossom like the rose, and merge, unperceived, into the Promised Land.

It is worthwhile to be faithful, a thousand times worthwhile. When we falter and grow weak, when our

thoughts are torn and scattered from the contemplation of the Face of the patient God; when it seems as though we were utterly unfit to approach His Holy Presence and receive Him into the sanctuary of our distracted soul; let us cast ourselves upon His mercy crying, "Lord, he whom Thou lovest is sick." So long as we turn our souls to Him, that long we are safe, clasped in the harbor of His everlasting arms.

Trial and temptation do not endure forever. There are seasons equally of joy, often intense joy, when Christ draws nigh to the soul that loves Him, when God is sensibly experienced, and we rest in His sweet peace. He was always close to us, but He does not always make His Presence felt in just this way.

With Mary and Joseph, in their desert wanderings with the Holy Child, we have reached an oasis. But alas how often have we thought the oasis to be the Promised Land! Heaven is still to be gained, and other souls must be helped as well to gain it.

Thankfully, our weary feet have touched the fresh green turf. We have dropped amid the cool shadows and thrust our hands into dew-drenched flowers. Our lips have sought thirstily the clear, sweet waters, and we have lain still, at last, in the soft rustle of the palms and the song of the waking birds! The peace of God has trembled down through the sapphire heavens to flood us about and lull us from the torment of pursuing pain. We have felt weak with a delicious weakness, because we knew it was cradled in the strength of God.

Close to the Christ-Child in Mary's arms, we filled the palm of His satin-soft tiny hand with kisses, and forgot that far off in the fastnesses of the Spiritual City it was clothed with the thunderbolts of Jehovah. We

forgot that this Baby-hand had come "to cast fire upon earth"; that it had come "not to send peace but the sword."² "Behold the Lord will come with fire, and His chariots are like a whirlwind."³

We forgot. We drew the veil of God's dear peace about our toilworn soul at the invitation of this created loveliness, and considered not the awful mission that had called it into being, innocent, undeserving of aught but love, yet come to expiate the bitter faults of our guilt-laden souls. We forgot it all in the beauty of that Baby-hand. We forgot; and it was good to forget for that little space.

It is the peculiar grace of the Christ-Child to infuse into souls the sweet and simple characteristics of His Divine Childhood; to strip them of their galling fetters and set them free once more amid the sanctities of an unspoiled life where great and simple laws reign in the beauty of perfect harmony. There truly we become "as little children," the condition on which alone we can enter into the bliss of Eternal Life.

It is good to be a child. It is good to get back to the elementaries of a child's faith and hope and love, where we build our Spiritual City in the song of the lark, the heart of a flower, the jewels of the sky, the haunted bosom of the lake; where we see visions and dream dreams, and make our own all the marvels and wonders which fade and vanish in the heat and turmoil of the garish day.

Now we step forth from cool, sweet shadows into hot, limitless sands, with joy still about us like a luminous mist. It haunts our footsteps through the long, toilsome day, and folds itself about us when night falls

² Luke 12:49; Matt. 10:34.

³ Is. 66:15.

and we lie down in the rest and refreshment of its memories. For it is an immortal joy, as are all the lovely graces of this Child. Even if we should grow ungrateful, and forget, it will still lurk in the secret recesses of our soul, prepared once more to enfold and gladden us. It is ours for all time, if we will, as the Child is ours with all the Kingdom of His Love.

This, too, we have learned: never again to say, "It is impossible." When the apprehension of coming trial casts its shadow and our soul quails at its first chill touch, we shall no longer sink down by the wayside and gaze into the desert with hopeless eyes. We shall no longer say with agonized conviction: "I cannot bear it; it is impossible!" We shall no longer weigh in our secret heart honorable and dishonorable escape, nor waver upon the boundary line of the desert and the pleasure of the multitude.

No, we shall turn desertward to Christ, and placing our hand in His, say to Him in perfect truth: "Well, since You have led me here; since You have willed in wisdom that I should suffer the tempest and the desolation, here, then, Lord, am I. What now? I have but followed You; I have proved submission; upon You rests the responsibility. You know my weakness, my helplessness; and since You have brought me face to face with the crisis, You will rescue, and defend, and bear me through victorious. Behold, O Lord, I am in Your hands and I believe in You.

"May I do Your Will perfectly and with joy. Sorrows and sighs enough the world brings You. May I serve You in gladness, through failure or success, through shadows or the sunlight of life, rejoicing always in You, my One Supreme Delight."

Then truly, with Thérèse of the Child Jesus, we can sing:

My peace is hid in Jesus' breast,
May His sweet Will alone be done.
What fear can mar my perfect rest
Who love the shadow as the sun?

We stumble on, through long days and dreary nights of our desert-life, our face bent low to the face of the Child; there all the world may fade away, and all its joy and hope and comfort, so long as God is left to us, and His breath, the breath of Life, is on our cheek. The pain of Him is dear and holy; His solitude has become our friend. It is the time of secrets, deep, mysterious, surprising. Our soul is haunted by silent presences, which lay gifts in its quiet chambers and leave us richer in immortal dower. And we are more and more content.

14

THE CITY OF THE SUN

OUT of the desert sands, like a vision of beauty before the eyes of the Holy Family, rise the bright lands of the Nile and the obelisks of Egypt. In the distance lies Heliopolis, the "City of the Sun."

Little, as yet, do its inhabitants understand that "the true Light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world,"¹ is even now about to shine upon its pagan darkness. He is the Light which shall be the lamp of another and an everlasting City of the Sun, whose domes and spires, as all devoutly hope, shall break at last the blue horizon line, when our own desert journey is over and our earthly dust is purged away.

After several days of travel, the tired Fugitives have skirted the Mokattam mountains. They are standing on the very site where, centuries later, the proud city of Cairo will creep up with its walls and palaces, its mosques and Allah worship, to mantle with the works of man those rocky sentinels of the Nile. But now, through the dreamy eyes of Mary's Babe, God looks out. And the blue of those eyes is dark with shadows, presaging the Almighty wrath to be aroused by the evil that will reign upon these hills.

How the Heart within Him beats and shrinks with

¹ John 1:9.

His knowledge of the future and the past, and how He turns in comforting relief to the true and stainless purity of His sweet Mother's breast.

There is His regal throne, so frail, so tender, humble and obscure, but precious beyond all the ivory and gold that ever have upborne the shining royalties of ancient Pharaohs. There, for all time, will men love to picture Him as the Child in Mary's arms, enthroned upon that new and most propitious Mercy Seat.

Hasan, El-Hakim, and Mehemet Ali shall reign upon the rocky steep, and the days of Ramadan shall be sung forth across the waters of the Nile from the minarets of his gleaming mosques. But around the sun-kissed warmth of Mary's bosom, where the Christ is held, shall break the choired song of the Prince of Peace, when all these others shall long ago have passed away and crumbled into dust.

The chill shadow of Mehemet Ali's Mount is left behind by our Travelers, and on through the lush sweet fields they wend their way, while all about them the scarlet flowers of the bright napolea flame and flash, and the dense green boughs of orange trees, laden with fragrant bloom and fruitage, dome the saintly heads that pass beneath them.

Only two more hours and the Wanderers shall have reached their destination.

They are safe at last, and with a new sense of sweet relief and tender thankfulness Mary looks into Joseph's watchful eyes. All the unspoken gratitude of their hearts is united in a silent prayer of praise. The Child looks up from Mary's arms and smiles.

Memories of that flight into Egypt still remain. At Old Cairo, underneath the Coptic Church of St. Sergius,

is a crypt, dating from the sixth century, which is dedicated to *Sit Miriam*, "the Lady Mary," because here, tradition claims, the Virgin and her Child rested for a time. At Mataria, until comparatively recent years, stood a sycamore tree, the successor of one which had decayed in 1665, and beneath which the Holy Family is said to have found a shelter. A cutting from the second tree was made to mark the spot and to preserve the old tradition.

But on the Island of Roda, not far from the very path where the Holy Wanderers passed, to this day is preserved the memory of another babe. For here, as rumor has it, Pharaoh's daughter found the child Moses cradled in a basket of bulrushes, and laid in the sedges by the river's brink, and here too, quite unknowingly, she handed over the child to its own mother to be nursed by her. A greater even than Moses was passing now, Who was to save and lead the people of Israel—all who would enter into His spiritual Kingdom.

In the lovely helplessness of infancy Christ is borne into Egypt, the land of the Gentile. In the years to come, in the long period of His toilsome, tireless ministry, His blessed feet shall never reach again this dark and pagan land. But He has loved it for its cherished memories; for Abraham, Jacob and Joseph, who abode here; for Moses and the multitudes of the Sons of Israel freed by Him; and for the exiled ones of His chosen people, who dwelled within this land.

He has loved it all as made by the hands of God: the verdure and the desolation, the slow waters of the Nile and the desert's golden sands. And He has so loved the scene of His mightiest manifestation of love and power, the turbulent waters of the Red Sea, to the murmur of

whose waves He may have listened during these first sweet years of tender childhood.

Lovely Flower of the root of Jesse, He graciously willed to bud and blossom in this consecrated ground, and to gladden it with the hidden glory of His Presence. In future years, the odor of that sweetness will still cling to it, and be a grace unto Eternal Life.

A few generations less than two thousand years before the coming of Christ, Joseph, the son of Jacob, paced these same lush fields and fragrant pathways between the limpid Nile and the "City of the Sun," in his wooing of Aseneth, daughter of Putiphar, "the priest of Heliopolis."²

Did the Spirit of God prophesy to this lover, amid the rustling leaves and glowing blossoms, and under the low-hung stars in the breathless night, the coming hither of another Joseph, guiding with the tenderest care and reverent love a little saintly Maiden of his own chosen race, within whose arms should lie fulfilled the great Promise to his fathers? Did those voices of the night speak to him of the infinite love in that Baby breast, of the yearning for souls which should drive Him hither to this pagan land? Did they tell him of that Maid and Mother, whose early years should be spent, not like those of Aseneth, his own fair bride, about the temple of the false sun god, but within the pillared courts of the Most High, and whose virgin arms should bear Him into the very shadow of these pagan walls?

And did the whisperings of those starry nights reveal to him the spiritual splendors that should shine forth from the footprints of the Infant Saviour on the soil made sacred by Him? Did they comfort this faithful

² Gen. 41:45.

soul with visions of the saint-strewn Thebaid, down in the Southern valley of the Nile; with visions of the multitudes of holy anchorites, men and women, who would turn the solitude into a paradise, and would render melodious the silence of the desert with their hymns and praises to the glory of the God of Israel? Did they speak to him of the legions of martyrs, virgins, confessors, who would spring from this land of his adoption, which Christ would sanctify by making of it His temporary home?

Surely, in the soft hush of those Egyptian nights Joseph the patriarch, the prophet, the "Nazarite among his brethren,"³ may well have dreamed with Aseneth of those years to come, when Christ, in all His infant-helplessness, might dwell beneath those very stars.

But it is time once more to return to the Holy Family, for the sun is sinking in the crimson West, and its setting glory crowns for the weary Exiles the great landmark of Heliopolis, the rose-granite obelisk of Usertesen I, beyond which lie the sphinxes and the colossal statue of the false sun god.

Already, as they enter the streets of this "City of the Sun," all is ruin and desolation. The poor habitations of the present generation are clustered in the shelter of the colossi of antiquity—the same which have sentinelled the desert for three thousand years before the coming of the Holy Babe.

Yet, is He not "the Ancient of days"! When Time was not, nor any created thing, when sun and moon and stars and mighty winds and raging torrents still slept in the thought of God, He already was. "Before Abraham was made, I am."⁴ So Christ would tell the Jews.

³ Gen. 49:26.

⁴ John 8:58.

Poor earth! Poor, puny efforts of man! You are both grown wrinkled and gray and old. You are falling into ruin and decay, while He Who was before the waters were gathered and the hills appeared, "Who stretched out the heavens as nothing, and spread them out as a tent to dwell in," now, in all the fresh sweet beauty of infancy, smiles up at the ruins of ancient days from that throne of the Virgin's arms.

Here also rise the dome and towers of the Jewish Temple, erected more than a century and a half before by Onias IV, and meant to reproduce in its beauty the lines of the great pile of the Sanctuary at Jerusalem. Its doors will remain open until they are closed by the Romans in the year 73 of our own era. It is looked upon askance by orthodox Jews and is therefore hardly favored by the Holy Family or regarded by them with any degree of reverence. But the music of the palms and the inspiration of the Prophets still sound here in contrast to the chants of Greek Helios and Egyptian Osiris, of Apis and Mnevis. How the thoughts of man have gone astray. The heart of the Child melts with love, and silently bides its time.

Where, in this old ruin, now the refuge of an oppressed and conquered race, will the Holy Family seek shelter for the long period of its hidden exile?

Doubtless there is some deserted roof to give them silent hospitality. The simplicity of their needs (how simple in their possession of the God of all things!) is not difficult to satisfy. "Four brick walls, a flat roof of palm branches laid across a split date tree as a beam, and covered with mats," perhaps a little quaint mulkuf, with painted sails, to catch the quickening eye of the

watchful Child, and to fan His cheek with the cool breath of the northwest wind.

No, there is no danger of pursuit, though new hardships will be faced in the old, storied city, embalmed in the wisdom of ancients and the spices of Araby, and quiet as the burnt-out passions of the mummied kings. There is peace and restfulness, and the presage of sheltered months or years, wherein the Child might unfold His heart in the crimson shade of the pomegranate, and His stainless soul in the white luster of the lotus of the Nile.

15

THE HOME IN EGYPT

THROUGH the white streets of Heliopolis the Holy Family wandered, weary with travel, and saddened a little, no doubt, with the aching sense of homelessness, but feeling withal the sure sweet guidance of the Hidden Hand.

The little home was found—quiet and secluded—where the Child might grow under His Mother's eyes. Providentially, the gold of the Magi secured for them whatever else was necessary, for little had Joseph been able to take with him in the haste of flight.

However bare the dwelling, poor and cheerless in the growing dusk, it was now God's house, more truly than the Temple yonder which the masters at Jerusalem never had acknowledged. It was God's house, where He would grow in sweetness and in strength; where He would lisp His first word and play the dear drama of His first step; God's house, where He would sleep and wake and play in the worship of Mary's eyes.

It was all very rude and comfortless to the weary travelers, that first night. But what is difficult to the eager hands of love? A few armfuls of sweet halfo grass; the sorting over and setting to right of the scant belongings of the Holy Family; the spreading of a soft rug and a few rush mats; the gathering of fagots for

the cheery fire; and over all the woman-touch in sprays of flowering almond and pomegranate, and in alabaster cups of the moonlike Lily of the Nile.

In our own day, within the confines of a southern Cairo suburb, there still stands a sanctuary meant, it is said, to mark the very spot where the Holy Family dwelt during its sojourn in Egypt.

The Nile spread the wherewithal for their modest supper, providing sweet fat meat of the lotus, juicy lentils, wild cucumber, and the ever luxuriant date. The ring dove cooed in the caves and the flashing wings of the swift flamingo bore to them the fading glories of the sky. The Child looked on with starry eyes, cooed with the doves, buried His hands in the cool pink blossoms, and basked in Mary's smile; and Joseph's heart was full content.

Thus began the new, strange life in Egypt, with many a smothered thought of Galilee and the blue lake of Genesareth beyond the desert and the hills. It began in darkness and uncertainty, in utter abandonment to the Will of God, with perfect trust in the fidelity of His Providence: "Behold He shall neither slumber nor sleep, that keepeth Israel."¹

How often we are perplexed as to the will of God. Perhaps we have not learned the art of listening. The ear of our soul grows dull with the noise of the world, blurred with its discord. Perhaps there are voices within us, the voices of passions that clamor and will not be stilled, that jangle the pure sweet notes of the Divine Singer. Let us but learn confidence and surrender into the hands of God. From that, love, too, will follow, and all shall then be well. So then our own way

¹ Ps. 120:4.

will also be made clear, and we shall find our peace.

As we look up into Mary's face and Joseph's, a great stillness comes upon us. It is the stillness of the speech of God.

Surely, in this pagan land, all was very strange and new to Mary, who had spent her short sweet life in the shelter of the Temple and in the quiet monotony of the humble home at Nazareth. Under even the most favorable circumstances it is difficult to adapt oneself to new surroundings, free from disturbance of mind and soul. Mary was called upon to bring many sacrifices, gifted as she was with all the quick susceptibilities, the eagerness, the freshness, the kindness of mind, and the pure, keen sense of unspoiled youth.

The wealth of her new spiritual world, combined with the poverty and deprivation of her material life, must have tried her profoundly with the constant discipline and sharp extremes of suffering and delight. The heavy responsibility laid upon her by the will of God steadied her with a sweet pathetic soberness, which must have wrung the heart of Joseph with a strange and painful tenderness as each new feature of the life of exile unfolded before his eyes the latent strength and richness of her perfect nature. All these were records for only Joseph and the Child to read; yet, the beatitude of eternity will unroll them to the eyes of all the Blessed.

For Mary, the object of her worship was always sensibly before her, embodied in the humanity of the Holy Child. He was there within sight of her eyes and touch of her hand. His very voice recalled her wandering thoughts from harsh and homely duties, when work grew hard and wearisome to the succumbing flesh, and willing hands faltered at each unwonted task. What

rest and refreshment in the soft cooing of that Baby voice. Her soul grew still and her eyes moist with the holy happiness of the unformed song containing heaven and earth. An infinitely tender smile quivered through the tender tears, and she was fain to pause for the rainbows in her eyes. Praise arose and pain lay still, and the music of her joy filled all the pure and silent corridors of her immaculate heart. He was hers; hers for years to come; Egypt, or the desert, Judea or Galilee—what did it matter so long as no power on earth could rob her of this supreme Gift of the Almighty God.

How dull we are of comprehension, how dim our eyes of faith! We, too, have God in our midst; we kneel before Him, and proffer our love and homage; we work in His name and toil and suffer for His sake; we take Him, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, within our very breast, into the closest union possible, and He absorbs us and makes us one with Him. How insensible, with a great stupid insensibility, to the magnitude of the joy that we might know.

"If ye but knew the greatness of the Gift that I have given you."

Poor, torpid senses of soul and body! What would Mary say of the ever fresh and limitless charm of that precious union, where her heart throbbed in successive ecstasies of delight, between the Divinity and the Humanity of the adorable Child? What would she say of the unclouded visions of her Eucharistic union in days to come, when He would no longer be visible to her corporeal eyes, but she would behold Him with the eyes of her spirit, as never yet has human being seen Him here below?

Now it was still her privilege sensibly to contemplate

the purely human nature of the Child, the perfection of Its outward form, the charm and fascination of His Babyhood; the pathetic appeal of His helplessness. Divinely dear to her was every coo and plaint of His Baby-mouth, every curve and dimple of His shining face, and the pure pink flush of His satin skin.

And, the eyes, those great wondrous eyes of the Christ Child! A silent awe would creep into Mary's enchanted soul and all the sweet familiarity of His humanity slip from her as worlds of Divine Mystery were lifted to her adoring gaze. They were the one thing that betrayed Divinity. As the midnight sky is contained in a drop of dew, so was the Divine Nature contained in the sapphire deeps of those two wondrous eyes; and Mary's soul sank ever deeper into their mystic splendors until the whole world vanished and she was lost in God.

16

THE FIRST ROSE

CAME the time when the tiny hands of the Christ Child grew restless and reached out beyond His Mother's arms, in obedience to an assertive childhood instinct.

A bit of sunshine through the open door; the sudden note of a joy-drenched lark; the flash of a rose; the bright shimmer and sibilant whisper of Joseph's toiling saw in the fresh silence of the early morning—at once the little hands reached out with the dawn of a child's spirit of investigation, and the blue eyes grew wistful for joys quite out of reach.

In all things Christ wished exteriorly to pass through childhood's normal stages.

Out across the wide world of that cottage floor crept and struggled the breathless Child, all awonder with the first sense of toil. It is a new kingdom of power which His little limbs have involuntarily revealed to Him. Mary's foot has craftily approached to Him a bit of gorgeous flower. With hands stretched out in a last victorious effort, the Child has grasped the glowing rose, and sitting up with a proud and solemn look, which the laughing mouth belies, He presses the rich blossom to His Mother's lips.

That must have been the first rose that Christ gave

to Mary; the queen flower to the Queen Mother, the first trophy glorified with the lovely and impulsive triumph of His Baby feet. Was ever rose so lovely, was ever deed so sweet! It seemed to Mary that she had never known a rose before.

The little, round, pink knees were red and rough and indented with their long journey across the cottage floor, and the pretty palms were soiled and moist with their first labor for Mary. But the heavenly larks in the Mother-heart broke forth with songs of joy; and rose and Babe were drawn together to her breast.

We wonder if, as is the way with mothers less perfect, less exalted, the crimson rose was laid away in some safe and secret place through the long years of Egypt and Nazareth and the Ministry. When the parting came, and she was left alone with only heavenly memories to keep her company, did she fondle it once more, brown and faded, but with the sweet pungent fragrance of other days clinging to its tender petals?

How it calls up visions of Egypt: the wide sapphire sky, which dwarfed even the desert, that sky of a blue so living it seemed ever ready to break with angelic speech; the slow waters of the Nile, chaliced with a thousand alabaster lilies; the hot sun and the cool stars; the radiant face of the triumphant Child, with solemn eyes and a halo of golden curls; and the rose—oh, miracle of unearthly revelations! How human it all is, how agonizingly real, since those same feet have trod the bloody road and God looked down from Calvary.

Slow we are to realize that in these little things Mary attained even higher and sublimer knowledge of the God-Man, of Divinity Itself, than all the scholars and masters of Israel could hope to learn! What revelations

of Divine Love must have flooded her soul at the pressure of that rose to her lips by the Baby-hands of the Incarnate God?

The learned ones of earth, the doctors, philosophers, teachers of Divine science, descend profoundly and loftily speculate upon the Godhead, upon the double nature and the unity of Person in Christ. Their work is elaborate, often marvelous, not seldom even excellent in its way, and yet we sometimes picture to ourselves how Mary would have smiled her dear sweet smile of simple, tolerant love, and wondered from the depth of her humility how it was that she, so unlearned, should find herself familiarly and intimately at home with God, where the coldly reasoned knowledge of others has often failed to bring them any nearer to Him, the end of all human knowledge.

There was no least thought, word, or action of Mary that did not bring her nearer to God. Her meat and drink in the days of the Hidden Life was the true knowledge and wisdom which she drew, not from the pages of human lore, but from the pure, upturned face of the Christ Child.

O, these stupid, overgrown, inflated minds of ours! How often they fail to realize that the first condition of true wisdom is to be "as little children," without which we cannot even hope to "enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."¹

Rejoicing in the Holy Ghost, Our Lord exclaimed: "I confess to Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them to little ones."² And in the Book of Proverbs Divine Wisdom invites:

¹ Matt. 18:3.

² Luke 10:21.

"Whosoever is a little one, let him come to Me,"³ not indeed that we may cultivate a faulty childishness, but that we may attain the wisdom and prudence of those who are truly God's little ones. Many a rose the hand of the Christ Child will press to our lips as well, and, like Mary, we shall drink deep of His Wisdom and Love.

"But the foolish things of the world," the Apostle says, "hath God chosen, that He may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the strong."⁴

Let us go to Mary. She will teach us wisdom and discover to us "hidden treasures and the concealed riches of secret places." What our lack of spiritual insight has failed to decipher, she will make known to us, and we shall become "poor and little, and of a contrite spirit," and we shall sweetly "tremble" at her words. For she will teach us that fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom—a deep and tender, child-like fear that does not dread God's punishment, but would not in the slightest ever fail to do God's Will, simply because it loves Him so.

Hers was the most perfect and highly developed spirituality, after Christ's. What, then, must have been the result of that intimate conformity of the human will with the Divine in this loveliest of all types of womanhood. And how that Christ Child loved her as He pressed to her lips the gorgeous rose with all it symbolized.

Here, as in all things, Mary's whole being responded to the Divine inspirations. Her soul had never known sin; her instincts had never been perverted. God found in her a perfectly keyed instrument of exquisite deli-

³ Prov. 9:4.

⁴ I Cor. 1:27.

cacy and purity of tone for the light soft sweep of the Baby-hand. What wonder that the sublime song of the Divine and human nature found music in that more than seraphic soul. What wonder that Mary's spiritual science was immeasurably beyond that of saints and sages, who never held Him in their arms, nor listened, entranced, to the unearthly sweetness of the strains of His Baby-voice.

Mary's will in its perfect pliancy, her heart in its every emotion, were the living keyboard on which God might play His divinest harmonies. To the least touch of His hand, conveying ever so gently the message of His Will, her sweet responsive chords yielded, note for note, the burden of His song. If the minor tones of earth crept in, Christ gathered them also into the music of her life, and enriching them with grace, enabled them to cheer many a mother's straitened soul in the days to come.

FIRST ADVENTURES

THE little venturesome spirit of the Holy Child, exhilarated with newly discovered power and eager to attain unaided the lovely things of His tiny kingdom—for I am describing exterior manifestations only—grew in boldness and ambition under the sweet temptation of Mary's smile. Till one day He stood alone.

The great round earth at last became a pedestal for the tender feet of the Incarnate God. Those little feet of the Creator clinging helplessly to the hard rough earth, those tiny feet about which angels hovered in silent adoration, for one blissful moment poised themselves unaided—till the red lips quivered with Baby fear and the hands reached out for the harbor of Mary's arms. O sweetness of Mary's kisses! O sacred moment of Mother-love! O blissful instant of speechless worship from creature to Creator!

What is that pathetic something in the pride of a mother as she watches the first tottering steps of her baby boy?

There is, of course, the tremulous fear of danger to the priceless little man, venturing for the first time from the safety of her arms; there is the radiant joy in the miracle that her tiny boy is achieving before her eyes; there is the pride of motherhood which claims

with a new passion of possession every atom of that little body which is giving birth to new energies in the great universe of mind and matter, and in obedience to external laws, doing its infinitesimal part in forwarding the infinite design of the Creator. But above all, there is the tender, choking love of the yearning heart, which forecasts the bitter time when those little feet shall wander, perhaps forever, from her clinging care; when they shall tread the path of life through the City of Sin, and go down into the valleys of pain and humiliation; when they shall struggle up the height in the face of danger and stand perhaps upon the perilous pinnacle of fame.

Is it all of that a mother's heart can feel? What then of Mary?

Is it only the simple world of that cottage floor, with Mother's arms to save the Holy Child, that she saw those little feet unsurely tread, or did other visions rise before her eyes?

Poor Mary! Poor little Virgin Mother, Prophecy-haunted, Seraph-haunted, God-haunted! Torn between transport and anguish was her mother's heart. For what did not the tottering feet of the Christ-Child trace before her God-illumined eyes in their short journey across the cottage floor. O, the dread and distant day, when the wandering away of those little feet will have an import which never human-mother soul could bear alone.

There would be heights and valleys, steeps and plains, beyond what mother heart had ever dreamed or foot of man traversed. The mighty Prophecies of Isaias and Jeremias, of Daniel and Zacharias, cast phantom lines in dim perspective before her shrinking eyes. He shall

be led "as a lamb to the slaughter." As the Child at last stood, wavering, within reach of her outstretched arms, she felt her strong young soul waver at the very brink of her human motherhood until the Christ-Child cast Himself into her arms, and she felt herself sinking into the deeps of the Divine.

She, with Him, is the predestinated Victim. She, too, must bring those sacrifices, which only the Power supporting her enables her to bear. Henceforth, all generations shall cry to her for intercession with her Son, as Co-Redemptrix, Mediatrix of all Graces.

Wonderful indeed were those days at Heliopolis. Looking eagerly into the holy babyhood of Christ through the soft veil of time floating across our view, we almost shrink and tremble with awe and unworthiness as our heart draws us closer and closer into its divine intimacies. And yet we dare to weave our loving fancies about that sacred humanity which He assumed that He might be like us in all things, sin alone excepted.

* * *

Came another great and memorable day in Mary's life. It was when, at some strange marvel of His Heavenly Father's handiwork, the little lips of the Divine Child struggled into articulate delight, and in a sweet exuberance of spirit babbled softly: *Abba! Abba!*—meaning "Father! Father!" These were words that He had caught from Mary's lips.

The Word had spoken, and the Word was God.

That, too, was the first articulate speech from Son to Father, the first vocal prayer of the divinely-assumed humanity; the first outward testimony of the Incarnate God to the Sovereign Ruler of the universe . . . a mighty

word from the soft sweet kingdom of two lips: *Abba!* —“Father!”

And as that word went forth from the little sanctuary at Heliopolis, it seemed to Mary’s joy-steeped soul as though the very hills and valleys must repeat it in their exultation. The world took on for her a new and radiant light, and the common things of life seemed to be transfigured.

In every tender climax of His Infant development, there was a touch of the Divine. The first dawn of intelligence in His tiny face, His first articulation, His first word, His first little creeping journey across the floor, His first step—what keen significance they had to the transported heart of Mary. Her life was one long meditation, one prayer of contemplation, one unbroken act of worship and adoration and service. It was so completely one with Him, that every motion of her body, every thought of her mind took its source from His human needs or His Divine Will, and ended in His holy service. She lived and breathed and had her being in her Religion, and her Religion was her Child.

Christian mothers, in the strong sweet folly of their love, are forced constantly to stem and check their affection in its headlong rush, lest they forget the Creator in the creature. They cool their fever and still their turbulence in the spiritual founts of the Divine Love, until the little face of their loved one is mirrored therein, pure and radiant with the touch of the Holy Spirit. Thus, human love takes on the truer, fairer, deeper colors of immortality.

They have no longer to conquer that ignoble jealousy which too readily may shadow the portal of a mother’s

heart, a jealousy which seeks sole possession, secretly and inadvertently perhaps, against the supreme claim of God. Now joyously, they find their child in Him, and Him in it. They train their stubborn will to follow the guidance of that Love which not only contains their human love, but doubles and multiplies it, and sets upon it that seal of the Divine, which shames all cowardice and selfishness. It shows them finally how poor and paltry, in comparison, is a purely and exclusively natural affection embraced by blinded and passion-tossed souls as the height of earthly bliss. More than content, they now share their loved ones with God, to possess them in God, and to hold them at God's ineffable mercy.

But for Mary, first and greatest of all Christian mothers, there were no bounds to the love she might lavish upon her Son. From the crown of His head to the sole of His tiny, adorable feet, all was God; God in miniature; God in fulness and plenitude. She might lay her kisses upon His mouth; she might bid Him lie obediently upon His little palm-leaf bed, or stand Him in a shrine of lotus lilies while she worshipped in prostrate awe. She might open to Him the holy of holies of her inmost heart, or look upon Him for a long, sweet hour. And always she would find Him all things to her, until her soul would break in song upon her lips, with only birds to listen and the heart of her Child to keep rhythmic measure against the great full floodtide of her own.

Long and laborious hours the sage pores over volume after volume of his lore; long and laborious hours the scientist scans page after page of the book of Nature; but the saint, with heart aglow and the breath of the Holy Spirit wafting through his soul, seizes and pos-

seses in exulting joy the life and spirit that lie beneath the outward forms of things and views them all in the pure glory of God's eternal day. So Mary heard and listened, and treasured up within her heart the mysteries of God. Well might she smile, with tender pity, into the tense faces of the worldly wise, who study long and yet may learn so little, while she remains for all time and all ages, the Seat of Wisdom, pure, white and resplendent, whence shines in all its glory the beauty of the *Logos*, the splendor of the Word.

She will teach us how to find a world of wisdom in that prayer of the Baby-lips of Christ—*Abba!* “Father!”

* * *

Among the ruins of the City of the Sun, at the very time when Mary with the Child traversed its silent streets, might still be seen the long white halls, with fountained courts and dome-palms, where Plato may have spent his travel years in Egypt. So near, in fact, did he in some ways draw to Christian truth that St. Augustine, in his *City of God*, applied to him the words of the Apostle: “Because that which is known of God is manifest in them, for God has manifested it unto them. For the invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, His eternal power also and Divinity.”¹

One day, the true *Logos*, the “Word” of the Eternal Father, was to take material form, the Invisible was to become visible, the Word to become flesh, and in the little tender figure of the Infant God, to play, perhaps, within the very halls where the soul of Plato searched for Truth.

¹ Rom. 1:19–20.

Truly did the mind of God, in its baby bonds, grasp the long-forgotten memories stealing in and out on the desert wind through the cool dim shadows of those deserted halls, and the soft baby palm passed gently over the rough walls, while a tender pitying smile crept over the mobile infant lips. We can see Him, Mary's Child, with little feet dipped in the cool green waters of Plato's placid court, and His great eyes reflected through a mass of tangled gold—those eyes, large with greater truths than ever those waters mirrored from the eyes of the prince of philosophers, truths actually, which lay hidden in the azure deep of the eyes of God.

The day was yet to come when He should stand in the Temple at Jerusalem, radiant in the wisdom of His gentle boyhood, teaching the doctors of the law, and unfolding to them the Scriptures.

To no one will ever be given to come so close to the fountain of Divine Wisdom itself as to Mary, who followed the little feet in their wayward wanderings, and listened with rapt countenance to all He spoke within her heart. But even to us, in the shadow of the Tabernacle, it is granted to pause and listen to the promptings of the Incarnate God, and there to lay our needs before Him.

18

THE EXILE OVER

QUICKLY months slipped by and the time approached when again the messenger of the Most High was to appear and recall the Exiles to Israel and to the gentle hills of Galilee.

Surely, one of the great angels at the Throne of God was deputed for this mission. It may have been Gabriel himself, the Angel of the Incarnation.

"And I saw another mighty angel come down from Heaven, clothed with a cloud, and a rainbow was on his head, and his face was as the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire."¹ So St. John seeks to make visible for us one of the powerful angelic spirits whom he beheld in vision. Less overawing, doubtless, to St. Joseph was the outward appearance of the high visitant now sent to him from God as the messenger of most welcome tidings.

Following the Egyptian custom, the Holy Family was spending the still hot night on the palm-leaf roof of their humble cottage. Back and forth, under the quiet stars, the strong, upright form of "the just man" Joseph paced, pausing only now and then to gaze down reverently and tenderly upon the sleeping Mother and Child, and pondering in his great and noble heart the inscrutable designs of the Almighty.

¹ Apoc. 10:1.

He could not read the future; he knew not how the great end of that little life was to work itself out. He was familiar with the Scriptures, and had pondered the prophecies of the Messias, but what was to be his own small part in this great drama? Was it just the simple daily life of humble toil for the material necessities of the Incarnate God and His Virgin Mother?

Close he walked to the Will of God; so close, his ear was attuned and trained to no other voice. He looked neither to right nor left. He looked not even down into the stirrings of his own heart, nor heeded the voice of its natural pleadings.

But for all his humility there was in Joseph something akin to the majesty of that Egyptian night, with its starry diadem, and the purple velvet of its sweeping tent. In the high places of his lofty soul he glorified, with an exultation of holy joy, the Divine Providence which had willed so to dispose it, that the rough hand of toil which held the saw, and fashioned the wood, and earned the daily wages for the frugal comforts of the Word made flesh, was a royal hand, and the blood in its pulsing veins was the blood of kings. He marveled that the King of Heaven, coming in helplessness and poverty, should yet wish to seek dependence upon the royal blood of earthly kings, and that the regal soul of David should reach out to the Infant God through the touch of his own strong hand, and serve Him in its loving ministrations.

As meditations merged with dreaming, the weary head drooped beneath the weight of the ancestral crown, and Joseph slept. Then followed what the Scripture tells:

"But when Herod was dead, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph in Egypt, saying:

'Arise, and take the child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel. For they are dead that sought the life of the child.' "²

Morning dawned at the golden rim of the desert, and the stars throbbed expectant upon the brow of day. The cool breath of awakening nature stirred the mingled locks of Mother and Babe, but sleep had been driven from Joseph's eyes by the angel vision. His soul stirred and trembled in the strong spell of its exceeding joy. Yet there before him was a vision even more beautiful, that of the Infant God, sweetly asleep in Mary's arms. A tender smile gathered about Joseph's rugged mouth; the memory of angel's wings flashed before his eyes, and then the strong man lay prostrate before His Creator present there in human form.

"Mary!"

There is no tremor in the voice as once before; no strain of repressed pain, nor note of yearning over the tender helplessness of Mother and Babe.

"Mary!"

"The rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land, the voice of the turtle dove is heard; the fig tree hath put forth her green figs, the vines in flower yield their sweet smell. Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come."³

With a tangle of heavenly dreams in her eyes Mary stands in the glory of the morning, and for very joy lifts the Child high in her upraised arms, beneath the vault of the radiant sky, like a priest raising aloft the chalice at the altar. The face of the Child dimples with her own bright joy and the sweet lips call through the fading

² Matt. 2:19-20.

³ Cant. 2:11-13 (slightly adapted).

stars: *Abba! Abba!* But from Mary's heart flows a prayer of praise and thanksgiving to the Father Who ordereth all things sweetly; her soft voice rises with her Son's pure tones, while like incense floats aloft the self-same anthem from Joseph's heart:

"Praise the Lord from the heavens. . . . Praise ye Him, O sun and moon; praise Him, all ye stars and light!"

The stars set, and the sun rose upon the fair new epoch in the life of the Holy Family. Only the golden desert, transfigured in the light of hope, now lay between them and Galilee.

In Christ was then fulfilled what had long before been prefigured by the Prophet Osee, when he wrote: "Israel was a child, and I loved him: and I called My Son out of Egypt."⁴

Literally, as is evident, these words refer to the people of Israel, but typically they foreshadowed the return of the Messias out of the land of the Pharaohs. This interpretation is made entirely certain by the words of St. Matthew. Describing Joseph's flight into Egypt with the Mother and Child, the Evangelist immediately adds:

"And he was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the Prophet, saying: 'Out of Egypt have I called My Son.' "⁵

We find the Holy Travelers once more upon the road, Mary seated on the little beast of burden with the Child upon her lap, and Joseph walking at their side. The Child's tiny hands pet and fondle the rough coat of the friendly animal and His voice makes sweet and merry the long hours of the desert day. His blue eyes light upon the loveliness of the landscape, and His little finger points it out with a child's insistence to Mary

⁴ Osee 11:1.

⁵ Matt. 2:14-15.

and Joseph, that they may look and be refreshed, and praise the dear providence of God which creeps from hidden places and secret ways under the divine magic of the tiny hand. Joseph wonders that they never saw such beauty on their way to Heliopolis; and Mary, in the wisdom of her Motherhood, smiles tenderly and looks into that radiant and inscrutable little face, for "the land that was desolate and impassable shall be glad, and wilderness shall rejoice, and shall flourish like the lily. It shall bud forth and blossom, and shall rejoice with joy and praise."⁶

There is no haste now, save the haste of joy; no danger of pursuit from the malice of men. Joseph can take the cool and pleasant route along the blue waters of the Mediterranean to Gizeh of historic fame, where Saint Helena was one day to build a noble Christian temple to the Child Whose little feet had come and vanished, leaving their holy echo among its verdant hills. Thence on to Ascalon.

There were difficulties, though, awaiting Joseph in Israel.

"Who arose," St. Matthew wrote of him, "and took the Child and His Mother, and came into the land of Israel. But hearing that Archelaus reigned in Judea in the room of Herod his father, he was afraid to go thither: and being warned in sleep retired into the quarters of Galilee. And coming he dwelt in a city called Nazareth; that it might be fulfilled which was said by the Prophets: 'That he shall be called a Nazarene.'"⁷

Doubtless it was the Angel of the Incarnation who again appeared in a dream to Joseph. Joseph turned once more toward the home of his earlier days, the city

⁶ Is. 35:1-2.

⁷ Matt. 2:21-23.

of his holy nuptials with Mary. Skirting lovely Carmel, he came at length to Nazareth, "the flower of Galilee."

It had been a journey of the spirit no less than of the body for these Holy Ones, so different from each other, yet touching at salient points of mutual appreciation, treading the path of God from different levels of loveliness, each forging onward under the motive power of love. This lightened every burden and sanctified every joy.

* * *

To the Holy Travelers, long restricted to the sterner, simpler beauties of Egypt, where there was far less to touch the soul through the power of the senses, the first glimpse of the foothills of Galilee brings anew the vision and breath of a terrestrial paradise. Through the deep gorges of the mountains of Menasses they pick their way. Gradually the towering height of Carmel casts its shadowy prophetic crown upon Our Lady's gracious head. Then, at last, they emerge into the gentler landscape of Galilee.

Before them lie the lowlands, starred with lilies and orchids, like royal carpets which celestial weavers might have dropped from the parapets of Heaven for the feet of God. Above their heads the wooded hills are sheeted with the gorgeous crimson and stainless white of the anemone, amid which the cyclamen finds a foothold for its purple bloom. Mary's heart rejoices in this living beauty. It calls to the hills: "Be ye fair!" and to the birds: "Sing!"—until the woods are filled with the music of God's praise.

Slowly, the travelers climb the last steep hill that rises between them and Nazareth. Nearness to home and friends, to rest and all the simple comforts of a sheltered

life, creeps about their hearts and lightens the toil of the rocky way. Each step brings fresh and lovely memories of the days, not yet so long ago, when Mary and Joseph, youth and girl, wandered together the round hills over, unconscious of the wings that shadowed them, unconscious of the Filial Love that watched from the heights of Heaven and one day was to walk with them in obedient subjection through these same fair hills of Galilee.

Nazareth, at last, lying far below. White homes creeping up the hillsides of sapphire waves and sunning themselves like gulls upon the rocks, girded about by the misty green of the olive and the fig and the strong dark hedges of the prickly pear. Nazareth! "Flower of Galilee," whence should emerge the *Nazareth*, the blossom that was to crown with immortal glory the "Root of Jesse."⁸ Nazareth! the hidden little village, the softly gleaming pearl of great price buried in the blue and gently heaving waves of that Galilean sea of verdure, blow, and foliage.

Incredible to the loving heart and ravished eye of faith, that this Nazareth should bow its lovely head under the mad malice and arrogant scorn of Israel and share the cruel ignominy of "The Nazarene." Nazareth, which in turn would refuse to wear with Him, in loving unity, the mantle of degradation. For the day would arrive when the men of Nazareth themselves would bring Him to the brow of yonder hill, on which the city stands, to cast Him down headlong; but He would pass unharmed from their midst.⁹

These things are not now in the mind of Joseph as he yields lovingly to the spell within the musing eyes

⁸ Is. 11:1.

⁹ Luke 4:29-30.

of Mary. Together the Holy Travelers rest a little upon the hill's brow, with lovely Nazareth at their feet, and the green plains of Jezreel stretching far beyond. Mary draws the Child to her knee and points out to His questioning eyes the landmarks of the old familiar home.

The little house itself—that of course came first, just there, on the outskirts of the town, half-hidden beneath embowering trees and pink oleanders. Blossoms drifted like sunset clouds against the white home of the Annunciation. Still further on, down the rocky steep, the well, the only well in Nazareth, "Mary's well" to this day, where all the women came to draw the sweet clear waters in their earthen chatties and cast shy glances at their own rare, dreamy, far-famed beauty reflected in the quiet pool. No wonder the Child looks up into His Mother's face—that face of such incomparable loveliness—where the spirit lingers in every line and curve, and glows like living flame within an alabaster lamp, till with love and admiration His little Heart can bear no more, and a little finger is laid upon her lips. So Nazareth is lost in the golden mist of the Child's mysterious eyes, filled with human tenderness.

Already the shadows are stealing upon the little village and laying furtive fingers all around. The ass is burdened with Mother and Child, and Joseph guides him down the flowery path to the dim streets below. Many a time the little party is stopped by the warm greeting of old-time friends; and the hearts of Joseph and Mary grow soft with the sweet knowledge that these are God's friends too, who do Him unconscious homage in the secrecy of His hidden ways. Yes, all the world is quite different when Jesus shares it with them.

The little home is finally reached. The Three pass

under the heavy fragrant blossoms of oleanders, and the bolt is drawn. In the heavenly record of the wondrous Hidden Life of God-made-man, another golden leaf is folded back amid the silence of the angels and beneath the Father's watchful eyes.

THE COTTAGE IN NAZARETH

THE earliest pilgrims to Palestine mention two sanctuaries which then existed in Nazareth. One was known as the House of the Annunciation; the other, as the House of the Nutrition. In the latter the Child Jesus was presumed to have been "nourished," and to have grown up from boyhood into manhood.

Today, the first of these is called the "House of Mary," the second has been named the "House of Joseph."

There is detailed knowledge of the House of Mary in which, according to most ancient and authentic Eastern documents, the Mystery of the Incarnation took place. As early as the reign of Constantine, some three centuries only after the death of Christ, a magnificent Byzantine basilica was erected on that site, enshrining within its vast edifice what in that early period was evidently believed to be the House of the Mother of God.

But the House of Joseph, however creditably accepted, is not so easy to locate; while his supposed "Workshop" is mentioned only as lately as the seventeenth century.

The House of Mary may be more or less typical also of the house into which, after the Annunciation, Joseph brought his newly wedded Bride, and to which in every likelihood he returned after the Egyptian exile. Other such houses still exist in Nazareth.

At the front of Mary's house was a cottage-like structure built into the side of a hill. Two stairways leading up to it were cut in the solid rock.

There was but one single chamber, opening into a vestibule, from which a short stairway descended to a moderately large cave, or "grotto," hewn out of the hillside rock. This excavation the architects of the Emperor Constantine transformed into a strictly Byzantine sanctuary, holding it to be the sacred spot where the Word was made flesh.

Suddenly narrowing at its further end, the fair-sized grotto changes into a mere passageway, leading to an exit. A flight of steps ascends from this, but it is of entirely modern construction, dating back no further than the sixteenth century. It leads upward over an accumulation of rocks and remnants of an ancient wall, to a second, very small and dimly lighted cavern. From appearances it once served as a cistern. Today it is rather questionably known as the "Virgin's Kitchen."

It is possible that the actual home of Joseph was quite similar to this. There, we may presume, the Son of God and Son of Man grew up under the care of His Foster Father and the love-filled eyes of Mary. To this home, in ripened manhood, he retraced His steps after each day spent in toilsome labor.

Long centuries ago the impressive basilica of Constantine, which enshrined the House of Mary, was destroyed by vandal hordes, but the grotto still remained, to be transformed into a new sanctuary by the Franciscan Fathers who now enclosed it within their walls.

In this connection the House of Loretto naturally comes to mind. Is this the cottage-like one-room structure, fronting the road, which disappeared long ago

from Nazareth? It is possible that from under the ruins of the Constantinian basilica, where it might have been preserved, it was taken up by angel hands in the year 1291, the first of three miraculous "translations" ascribed to the House of Loretto. But Eastern tradition holds no record of any such miraculous intervention. Other problems confront us here which fortunately we are not called upon to solve. One thing is certain: humble souls who worship their Incarnate God, whether in the West or in the East, whether at Loretto or in the grotto of Mary's house at Nazareth, will not be left unheard by Heaven's queen.

* * *

Simple, as in Heliopolis, were the furnishings of Joseph's humble home. There was no lack of beauty, though it contained only necessities. Beauty was necessary to those Holy Souls, no less than meat and drink. But the beauty consisted in an exquisite cleanliness, neatness, and harmony; in a certain grace of touch and perfect adjustment which accords with high spirituality as well as with high natural perfection of the esthetic sense.

Beauty is an attribute of God: "He is clothed in beauty." Under the inspiration of that beauty wherein God is robed, the souls of Joseph and of Mary put forth their powers to achieve all things beautiful so that perfect loveliness and harmony might reign in the pure sanctuary of the Son of God. Well might it be said of Christ Himself: "Thou art beautiful above the sons of men."¹

¹ Ps. 44:3.

How very lovely must have been that first morning of the hidden life in Nazareth.

Bright and early, as the sun is creeping around the shoulder of the hills, Mary and Joseph are out in the fresh sweet glory of the morning, with the little white-robed figure between them. Dappled is the scene about them with the pink flush of oleanders, and glad is all creation with the joy of living. Then, in his arms, Joseph lifts the Child, and Mary folds His little hands, while His lips sing softly after the mother-voice:

Sing joyfully to God, all the earth:
Serve ye the Lord with gladness.
Come in before His presence with exceeding
great joy.²

Let the heavens rejoice,
And let the earth be glad,
Let the sea be moved, and the fulness thereof:
The fields and all things that are in them shall
be joyful.³

Mary looks adoringly into the Child's enraptured eyes, and murmurs through the fulness of her heart, "Praise and beauty are before Him: holiness and majesty in His sanctuary!"⁴

Then the busy tasks of the day begin. Mary lifts the shapely earthen jar to her head and goes down to the well at the foot of the hill for its sparkling water. Joseph builds the fire, while the Child toddles in and out, His hands full of chips to kindle the flame upon the little hearth. And with those tongues of fire leap up, ever brighter, the flames of love in the great heart of Joseph.

² Ps. 99:2.

³ Ps. 95:11.

⁴ Ps. 95:6.

What wonder that he stays longer upon his knees than is at all necessary; that he takes the kindling, chip by chip, from the little hands. Slowly, slowly, he casts in each tiny piece, and watches the bright blaze calling forth responsive brightness from the Child's face. Then, as upon the path without Mary's returning step is heard, and her gracious figure fills the doorway with a new and softer light, Boy and man arise from their secret interchange of silent love.

The little table is spread, the frugal meal prepared by Mary's deft and dainty hands: each act a prayer, each motion a glad and tender act of love. Then Joseph stands, with raised arms and lifted eyes, to invoke the blessing of the Father. Mary and the Child join in, and the grace of God descends like sunlight from the skies.

Off to seek his day's work, Joseph goes his way. His path leads farther up into the village, where the simple shops and market are congregated for the needs of the many cottage homes. Today the "Just Man" has not long to wait. They know him well, these Nazarenes, and an order for his honest toil is quickly given. Soon saw and plane and hammer are making crude persistent music in the stillness of the valley. Heaven rejoices, knowing that the Incarnate God has willed to be nourished and supported thus by the hard, firm hand of humble toil.

Sometimes, though, the thought of his embowered sanctuary down the winding road grows too strong within the busy man. His firm hand trembles, and in spirit his great soul goes down in worship at the tiny feet making their own sweet, uncertain music upon Mary's floor. For a short moment, the arm of Joseph rests and his heart prays, till he finds himself half waking and half dreaming through the mazes of his joy,

and unconsciously his hand again takes up its business.

Mary, too, has set about her humble duties, ordering the little home, to make all fair and sweet and daintily attractive for Jesus and for Joseph. No speck of dust is left in any corner. Cups and plates are ranged in the little cupboard and garments folded in the press. Last of all, the spindle and distaff are made ready for use. Then off, into the starry fields Mother and Child go forth to gather great armfuls of iris and asphodel, the tall blue lupin with its chime of bells, the weird orchis, and the snowy gold-eyed daisy.

But the little feet grow weary under the noonday sun and are ready to turn homeward, where Mary fills the earthen jars with bloom of wood and meadow to gladden the sight of her devoted spouse. O, perfect work of the Mother of God!

What lovelier vision this side of heaven than that which greets Joseph's eyes as, in the golden light of the summer evening, he climbs the path to the little cottage up the road. There, all luminous in the open doorway, sits Mary, softly passing unspun cotton through her fingers, with the white figure of the Child nestled beside her on the floor, His blue eyes gazing off across the hills into the red-gold of the sunset sky.

In the shadow of the great oleanders, whence the song birds send forth belated choruses, Joseph has to pause. Once more he feels his strong soul tremble with the sweetness of his guardianship and the magnitude of its sublime responsibility.

Thus, as Scripture tells us: "The Child grew, and waxed strong, full of wisdom; and the grace of God was in Him."⁵

⁵ Luke 2:40.

All living was a spiritual dream for Mary and Joseph through those days in Nazareth. Material things seemed strangely immaterial; the commonplace, ideal. There was a freshness, a divine novelty to thrill the senses and stimulate the soul. It lifted veils and opened doors into the super-mundane world, it let the glory through in all manner of startling loveliness. Mary and Joseph were constantly catching the smile of it upon their lips, and the light of it upon their brows. They looked into each other's eyes, and knew; and then into the Child's, and worshipped. Their hands faltered at their tasks from the weakness of sheer joy; then grasped them with sudden strength and a sense of safety, as means from God to keep them in the beaten track of daily life, while their souls were soaring into infinite delights. It was the fullest, richest, deepest life that ever human beings lived, that humble life at Nazareth, the glories of which bid fair to dazzle our eyes the closer we look into the heart of it and take it to our own.

As the soft still night crept into the sweet seclusion of this little cottage, and laid its velvet touch upon the walls, and kissed the tired little brow, Mary's arms fell tenderly about her Child and drew Him upon her lap to spend the dearest, sweetest, holiest hours of all the day. There were grave confidences from her Boy of little troubles and perplexities, delights and mysteries and joys: the great domed palaces of the ants explored by childish eyes, with half stammered hints of "the many mansions in the Father's kingdom"; the snow-white dove that fluttered down and ate crumbs from His timid hand. Then softly crooned the voice in Mary's ear: "One is My dove, My perfect one is but one!"⁶ And

⁶ Cant. 6:8.

the sweet eyes looked into Mary's face and watched it flush and quiver and grow still, in the mighty love of God.

Two heads drooped over the little folded hands, and Jesus prayed His Baby-prayer: "Abba! Abba! Thy will be done; Thy glory come. Guard those I love. Amen."

20

AN IDYL

ONE night as Mary reads aloud to the Boy from the Sacred Script, and her sweet voice trembles under the music of the Canticle of Canticles, in His Heart springs up the loving plan to fashion just such a garden for her. In the time to come, He and she may go down hand in hand "into the garden, to the bed of aromatical spices, to gather lilies," and there feed upon the delights of the love which is burdening Mary's heart with its ever deeper and sweeter revelation.

For many mornings, long before the village is astir, the Boy is hard at work in a sheltered corner of the hill which overlooks the little cottage and the distant sweep of sunny plain. To the east, Tabor lifts its head. Carmel, to the west; and far off in the distant north, white-breasted Lebanon rises, white as the lilies that shall grow beneath the boyish hands and with their purity and beauty rejoice the stainless soul of His beloved.

The garden is all prepared: fresh mold turned up to the life-giving sun; stones gathered and laid in orderly rows about beds and winding walks; and paths made smooth for Mary's gentle feet. Many a lesson for His dear soul is the Boy pondering in His Heart. Many an obstinate weed and heavy stone, and dry, unsightly bit

of turf His patient hands remove, in prophecy of the hard, long days of His ministry, when the sun of His grace shall shine in vain into the hearts of many and the lilies of His love shall find no foothold in their stubborn soil. But He toils on, with a smile of settled sweetness on His face, His blue eyes grow deeper with the intensity of thought.

But the garden is yet to be stocked with the flowers of the Canticle. Day after day the young feet climb the sleeping hills and explore meadows and valleys for their dew-drenched treasures, setting them all in stately rows and pretty labyrinths for the joy of Mary's eyes. Deftly the untrained hands go about their loving work, and gratefully young trees and shrubs and plants respond to faithful care.

The cypress and the apple trees, the olives and the figs, the cinnamon and the sweet cane, spread their glossy leaves and fragrant spices at the hidden magic of this creative hand. And the hyacinth and mandrakes, the pomegranate and balsam richly bud and blow beneath His moist sweet breath. A sunswept space is still left open for roses, wherein His Heart might revel in crimson tides of love, space for the royal rose of Sharon and the wild sweet rose of the hedge. A cherished spot is found, also, for the lily-of-the-valley and the immortal "flower of the field." But every pathway in the garden of delights must be bordered with row upon row of the stately white-chaliced, golden-hearted, royal lily of the Lord's beloved.

One morning, when the birds are weaving golden songs in the rose-lattice about the garden of delights, and the tasks of the little home are done, Jesus draws His Mother's arm about His shoulder, and, looking

into her dear face, pleads: "Mother, come!" With the sweet trust and dependence which mothers love to show to the incipient manliness of their sons, Mary asks no questions but quickly smiles consent; and in the joyousness of her young heart whispers: "Draw me: we will run after Thee to the odor of Thy ointments."¹

The Boy draws His Mother into the secret winding path, up the hillside, under the orange and olive trees, and finally the two are "looking through the lattices,"² with wet roses all about them and the incense of the lilies blowing through. Jesus takes His Mother reverently by the hand, guides her in, and looks again into the glory of her face. But Mary cannot speak. Her love is all atangle in her throat, and the tears are lying in the deep blue shadows of her eyes. She kneels among the lilies until her eyes are on a level with the eyes of God; and from the lattices of His golden lashes those eyes of God look through.

This was one of the silences in the life of Mary which were created by the immensity of sweetness of Divine Love.

There were times when the fleshy veils of Christ's human nature seemed to etherealize, to become so transparent that the Spirit looked through and touched the spirit of the Virgin Mother with an unearthly thrill. It was all the more entralling because Christ willed not only to appear but actually to be so undeviatingly human in His human nature. Here, when the ungovernable strength of her love broke bounds and involuntarily won forth from Him this prelude to the Beatific Vision, there was the overwhelming seizure of a Divine

¹ Cant. 1:3.

² Cant. 2:9.

surprise, a glory shining through the veil, from the blaze of Beatific Light.

But the veils of sense had not been rent. The Divine rapture passed. The sweet eyes drooped, and Mary laid her radiant face in the little sun-brown hands of her gentle Boy, while her heart went down in humble praise and lay in the shadow of His feet.

Jesus lifts her, in His young strength, and leads her to "the fountain of gardens: the well of living waters, which run with a strong stream from Libanus,"³ and sets before her honeycomb and vine, that they may feast together, while the morning unfolds its loveliness to their attentive hearts and the garden bathes them about with wave upon wave of color and light and fragrance. But the eyes of Jesus grow pensive as He lifts the cup. He looks into her eyes, and, through them, into the dim beyond, while the blood of the crushed grape turns red upon the crimson of His lips, and there rises to His mind the future Consecration and the bloody Sacrifice to be completed on the wine-press of the Cross.

³ Cant. 4:15.

THE TWELFTH YEAR

THREE was a gradual getting used to human life those first twelve years. The Holy Child steadily increased in that experimental science which in loving humility He deigned to acquire, because He sought and loved every obstacle through which His dear soul had to struggle.

The little joys and sufferings were no surprise. But there was all the tender love and absorbing interest of coming into personal touch with them, of letting them enter into the natural development of that complete and perfect humanity which was to characterize His life on earth and secure the victory of His love over our wayward hearts. So the little fingers were burnt and cut, the feet were bruised, the head wounded; and the tiny body shivered with cold and was oppressed by heat, and bore its God-willed dole of human suffering. Mother, of course, must hear each tale of joy and grief, and must pour out the balm of her endless love and exquisite sympathy, while the human soul of the Divine Child weaved it into a heavenly tapestry in the sight of God.

As the Child grew into boyhood His little world took in a circle beyond the cottage door and Mother's guiding hand. There were berries to be picked, and fagots to be gathered for the fire, errands to be run to the village and word to be brought to Joseph's shop.

With the little tasks done, there were all the delights of a boy's intimate association with nature and companionship with others of his age; there were treasures of field and wood and mountain side to be collected for His Mother. Never could the Boy be quite happy until she had seen and smiled her beautiful appreciation.

One day, He laid into her ever ready hand an abandoned bird's nest, with its lovely treasure of chipped blue eggs, as blue as His own eyes. She told Him in return how she, too, thanked the Father for the Nestling that it had been given her to bear, and to set free at last in the haunts of men. She would not stay Him when His time would come, for her heart was that of the woman valiant.

Already, indeed, the eyes of her Son were raised to the distant heights of Juda. In spirit He scanned, with Divine pre vision, the silver waves of the Lake of Galilee, and watched young John, with James and Peter, go down to the sea to fish. He saw the home in Bethany whence Magdalen would drift away into the haunts of sin to be saved at last by Him; there He saw Martha and Lazarus, and the others who should reward His toil. And all the while His Heart waxed strong, His Spirit was strained for the hour which His Heavenly Father had set, when His mission work was to begin.

Well can we understand how Mary counted the years and months and weeks and days, and every precious moment, until the time when His twelfth year would legally emancipate Him from her tender control. It was a trial to Mary, even in prospect, to contemplate the silent clipping of little tendrils which held Him to her in the sweet dependence of childhood.

These events were inevitable, Mary knew. She had

seen and pondered them sufficiently before she gave her *Fiat* to the message of Gabriel, but at the presentation of each new trial her Mother-heart still rose up and fought against the pitiful cry of nature. She was to lay up her pain in the breast of her Son as an inexhaustible treasure whence we, her spiritual children—as yet unborn to her—might draw indulgence and mercy in our day. With ordinary mothers it is too often simply the inevitableness of nature; with her it was a meet and beautiful submission to the Will of God.

In the life of every young Jew, the day came when he formally entered the synagogue, and, binding the phylacteries about his brow, became “a son of the Law,” subject to its prescriptions. That was the twelfth year of his age when he had legally reached his majority. Now, in the peace and sanctity of a Sabbath morning, we find Jesus wending His way between Mary and Joseph through the quiet streets of the city to be formally presented in the synagogue of Nazareth.

We see Him, a small, white-robed, golden-haired figure, replete with the unconscious grace and gentle dignity of sanctity, standing in the solemn silence of the people, and our hearts thrill as He lifts the long parchment, written from end to end in the golden letters of His own inspired text, and binds it solemnly about His glorious brows. He looks upon the people, this slim young Boy with the unfathomable eyes, this Son of the carpenter, Whom all the boys of the village love, and the children worship, and the old men silently revere; but as the voice of the multitude breaks out into the verse of Moses, to Mary’s eyes there blazes forth upon the brow of her Boy, the name of the King of kings: “I am Who am.”

"Who art Thou?" the Jews would ask, and He would answer: "The Beginning, Who also speak unto you!"¹

Silently, at the far end of the synagogue, Mary stands and worships. Her breath comes quick and short as the vision of the majesty of God blinds her eyes, and the great deeps of the Uncreated Light—though seen "darkly"—yield world within world of eternal beauty, into which one day He shall lead her and crown her to the music of the Word. The full beauty of that Incarnate Word is still veiled to her, Its music muffled; yet Its Divine and glorious life, indiscernible to the heavy-eyed multitudes, shines forth and blazes brightly before Mary's eyes of faith. He is indeed her Son, begotten of her ever-virgin flesh, but He is no less the Word, uttered by the Father through all the luminous eternity of His Being.

The rite is completed, and there, before her, stands a son of the Law Who is the Maker of the Law.

* * *

The first great obligation thus newly assumed will be participation in the Paschal ceremonies at the Temple in Jerusalem. They will take place in the spring, when from all sides streams of pilgrims will pour into the great city like so many rivulets in the sea. It is to be for Him a significant event to which He looks forward even now as a fulfilment, in part, of His Father's Will. Yet further trial and suffering will be involved in it for those most dear to Him.

With all this before His mind, the Boy Jesus stands pondering in His Heart the Law which He Himself had laid down, whose yoke He had now taken upon

¹ John 8:25.

Himself. What was the Paschal Lamb but a symbol of His own great future Sacrifice, when He would take upon His own shoulders the unutterable burden of our sins and offer up His own life in expiation to the Eternal Father. By His Passion and Death alone, according to God's Providence, could mankind be saved and the gates of the Eternal Jerusalem be thrown open to us. To obtain that guerdon we must apply to ourselves the merits of His Precious Blood.

22

THE PILGRIMAGE TO JERUSALEM

DAYS pass and once more the vitalizing hand of spring reaches out to the frostbound earth. It showers the hills and flowers the valleys. The song of liberated brooks is taken up by the rejoicing birds, and the glad thrill of resurrection stirs the heart of all created things. The thickly populated towns of Galilee are astir with preparations for the great pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate the Pasch, and this year Jesus is to go up to the Temple itself, with Mary and Joseph, as the Law prescribed.

In the early morning the caravan climbs the sun-clothed steeps of the Manasses, and all day long toils across the hill country of Samaria; past Sebast and patriarchal Sichem, and on to Jacob's Well, in the deep cool shadow of Mounts Ebal and Gerizim.

Crimson tulips brim with glowing color the vale where Rachel watched her flocks, and lie upon the lips of the cool well where Jesus was one day to quench His thirst at the hand of the Samaritan—the thirst above all of His Divine Soul for the soul of a sinner. We watch Him as He draws His Mother to the quiet waters, and filling His slender hands, bids her drink. Mary lays her lips to the rim of the Divine cup, but her soul drinks in far deeper draughts of love.

From Jacob's Well to Beereth is a long day's jour-

ney, but it winds amid the beauties of the flower-clad mountains of Ephraim, where the silver tones of the Boy's voice flooded the quiet valleys with the music of royal psalms. With gentle insinuation He led the earth-bound thoughts of the scattered bands of Jewish pilgrims from the material loveliness of the works of the Creator to the heights of the Creative Source, and flashed upon them His own heavenly light of inspiring worship. Loud and clear His modulations sounded on the crystal air:

Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit?
 Or whither shall I flee from Thy face?
 If I ascend into Heaven, Thou art there:
 If I descend into Hell, Thou art present;
 If I take my wings early in the morning,
 And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea:
 Even there also shall Thy hand lead me:
 And Thy right hand shall hold me.¹

Over the heads of the pilgrims sang out the pure sweet voice of Mary's Son. And as they looked up to Him in wonder at the melody and power of His song, His voice began anew:

Praise the Lord from the earth,
 Ye dragons, and all ye deeps:
 Fire, hail, snow, ice,
 Stormy winds, which fulfil His words:
 Mountains and all hills,
 Fruitful trees and all cedars . . .
 Young men and maidens:
 Let the old with the younger, praise the name
 of the Lord:
 For His name alone is exalted.²

¹ Ps. 138:7-10.

² Ps. 148: 9-9, 12.

And still the pilgrims listened entranced to the wonders of revelation in the old familiar words, for the veils were rent by the music of the voice of God.

Beeroth is reached. Like a sentinel eye it gleams upon the western tip of the mount of Quarantine. The flame of the setting sun scintillates among its silver fountains with the welcoming light of a friendly refuge for the weary pilgrims from Galilee.

But in the stillness of the evening, when the camp fires are burning low and stars are throbbing in the purple vault, the Boy wanders off into the lovely solitude of the hills to ease His Heart of the wearing constraint of the multitude. He turns His eyes toward Jerusalem, only a few miles distant, and the young face melts into lines of sorrowing love. Presently the soft voice of His Mother breaks upon the silence of His soul: "Watchman, what of the night!"³

The Boy turns, as His Mother lays her arm across His shoulder with a smile upon her lips and the love-light burning with its slow, consuming fire in her eyes. Looking steadfastly into her trusting face, He answers solemnly: "The morning cometh, also the night."⁴

Little knew her beating heart how soon it would be pierced with sorrow, when for three days, with Joseph, she would seek for her Beloved, only to find He had been called to leave her for His Father's business. Well might Jesus speak to the Eternal Father David's words: "The zeal of Thy house hath eaten me up."⁵ But Mary, in turn, could answer Him in blind and perfect faith: "My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready."⁶

At last, Jerusalem. Multitudes of pilgrims beyond counting are gathered here within its walls to celebrate

³ Is. 21:11.

⁴ Ibid. 12.

⁵ Ps. 68:10.

⁶ Ps. 107:2.

the Pasch. Three millions, Josephus estimates. Rather an evident exaggeration. Yet it serves to indicate how amazing was the throng, and how strongly the law of God was bound upon the heart of the Jew, though faint the spirit which animated it.

The Boy looks upon the seething crowds, the many stern, sharp faces, cunning and unjoyful, restive under the foreign yoke. His own young heart beats fast. They are looking for the blazing banners of a temporal king who shall lead them to victory against the abominated power of pagan Rome. He has come to raise instead the blood-draped standard of the Cross. Truly, a gigantic task. Through ages of perverse interpretation the Law of Moses has been transformed largely into a huge machine of temporal expediency, of judgment without mercy. Its heavenly spirit is bound fast to earth, but a few great hearts still grope earnestly, though helplessly by themselves, for the flash of vanished wings.

The heart of the Boy grows heavy to suffocation and His feet are weighted as with lead. He knows what hatred and defiance will glower up at Him from so many of those hardened faces. He is to beat His strong young life against the rock-bound obstinacy of so many of those hardened hearts. But the Cross which they will raise for Him—He shall dye it red in the glory of the Blood which neither time nor tide can efface.

But His time has not yet come. Quietly He will observe the Paschal rites. "Seven days shalt thou eat unleavened bread: and on the seventh day shall be the solemnity of the Lord."⁷ So was God's Law laid down by Moses to the children of Israel when the Lord had newly brought them forth out of the land of Egypt.

⁷ Exod. 13:6.

Somewhere in the thronged city, the Holy Family gathers now to celebrate the "solemnity of the Lord." Their thankful hearts are busy with the wonders of that guiding Hand which has led its unruly and self-willed nation to the eve of Redemption and the gate of Salvation. There is still a bitter *Via Dolorosa*, as they know well and the ancient prophets have foretold—a "way of sorrows," to be stained with the blood of the last great Victim ere the multitude shall be led out of spiritual bondage to the precincts of the Promised Land. Unknown, unrecognized, their King and Lord, Who will be Priest and Victim, sits even now in the midst of their feast, in the stronghold of His own royal city. But the eyes of so many in that multitude are blind with pride, and their hearts are hard as stone. A carpenter's Son, with only the crown of His golden hair, is biding His time while they know Him not, and all of Sion trembles upon its base.

The sun's last rays are on the Boy's face as He asks of Joseph, in accordance with the Law, the meaning of the feast. And solemnly, with bated breath, Joseph reminds Him, Who is Himself the God of His people Israel: "With a strong hand did the Lord bring us forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Reverently, then, Mary slips her hand under the hand of Jesus, and it closes upon hers in the strength and youth of the Son of God.

Throughout the seven days of the unleavened bread, the Holy Family stays within the city. In silence and recollection, in holy memories and prophetic visions, in simple work and prayerful rest, in daily visits to the Father's Temple, and in long illuminating meditation on the Scriptures, the days slip away under the

Father's eye, and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Eternal Word Itself interprets the written word for Joseph and for Mary, and spells for them the sweetness of its love.

Mary and Joseph linger above the golden head, bowed to the ancient parchment. A gleam of unearthly light follows the slender finger across the Sacred Text, illuminating, glorifying, revealing, reconciling all things in the glowing recesses of their holy souls; till their hearts burn within them, and they close their eyes and worship, in silence and in awe, the exceeding majesty of the Son of God.

As Jesus turns to the story of the Israelites' release from the Egyptian bondage, we can hear the low voice falter over the first and last of those dread plagues which fell upon the hardened heart of Pharaoh:

"In this thou shalt know that I am the Lord: behold, I will strike with the rod, that is in my hand, the water of the river, and it shall be turned to blood . . . and let blood be in all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood and of stone."⁸

As He comes to the last of these dire visitations the sweet eyes of the Boy droop in pain over the slaying of "the first born," and the tears gather in Mary's eyes at the memory of the Holy Innocents. Then, sacredly, she lays her Mother lips to the bowed head of her own *First Born*, knowing that as such He too is "the Lord's," and profoundly she reflects within her soul on "the great price" which must still be paid to redeem mankind.

⁸ Exod. 7:17, 19.

23

THE BOY JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

GRATE caravans are filing slowly, laboriously, out of the gates of Jerusalem, and the Holy Family finds its way as best it can in the unwieldy crowd. The Paschal Feast is over.

Close abreast of Sion, Jesus suddenly makes His way up the noble steep as the morning sun flashes upon the golden dome of the Temple. His young Heart is burning within Him; His limbs are tense with the overwhelming strength of the holy passion for His Father's glory which seizes and possesses Him at sight of the multitudes.

Directly, His feet are drawn by the Divine Will to the wide open space under the Porch of the Gentiles. Here, at the Beth-Midrash, masters and disciples are met together, discussing and interpreting the Law.

There is no hesitation, no wavering or uncertainty in the action of the Boy. He is moving under the unerring influence of the Holy Spirit and presses on, forgetful of all but His Father's glory. Suddenly He finds Himself standing between the outer pillars of the great Porch, a small white figure in the lifting shadows of the morning, unnoticed, unannounced. His breath is caught in the strength of His emotion, His pure face flushed with the royal blood of Kingship, and in the

great eyes smoulders the consuming love of His Divine Heart.

There is but one word trembling upon His lips, one thought flashing its eternal beauty through His Soul, one need crying through the depth of His Being. *Abba!*—“Father!” With that word, the Boy steps out into the view of all, passes through the circle of disciples, and stands in the midst of the Doctors of the Law.

A deep hush falls upon the assembled sages. There, in the very midst of them, is Hillel, in all the dignity of his closing years, revered as little less than the peer of Moses. There is his young and ardent grandson, Gamaliel, who in years to come will teach Saul of Tarsus the intricacies of the Law. There is the unyielding Shammai, “who bound all that Hillel loosed.” There, too, is Jonathas, son of Uziel, whose speech was so fiery, the legends say, that the birds as they passed above his head “either burned or were transformed into seraphim.” There, finally, among the learned “seventy,” are Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. For a moment all pause, awe-struck, in the impressive presence of the Boy. Then the thread of argument is brokenly resumed.

It was an age when all minds were occupied with the coming of the Messias, Whose time, according to the prophecies, was at hand. It was a period, indeed, of deep and earnest study for the sages; but the obscure references to the meekness and abjection, the humility and temporal lowliness that were to characterize the Redeemer, were insuperable difficulties to their proud and wilful minds.

As the Boy listened to the perverse interpretations with which they sought to warp Eternal Truth into a sanction of the very pride and prejudice of their race;

as He heard, deeply grieved, the subtle sophistries with which they stifled the whisperings of conscience, and saw the dark veils their own hands cast about the faint light still struggling within them, He lifted His eyes and looked far into the future. In bitterness of spirit He saw and weighed all the untold havoc of those heresies His Church was to endure from the wilful pride of man. Then, rising up in the righteousness of Truth, He laid bare His inmost soul in quiet and impressive words.

Simple, direct and unadorned, pointed and unassailable were the illuminating truths that fell in question and answer, from His soft sweet lips, to the wonder and confusion of the accumulated wise men. His brow was majestic with the light of Truth; the flame of it blazed from His eyes and burned upon His lips. In all that assembly there was not one but felt his heart burn within him as the breath of the Holy Spirit swept from the lips of the Son of God.

Three days the Boy returned to wrestle with the darkness and obscurity of the most powerful minds of Israel; three nights He slept just anywhere, under the shelter of the porches, or on the Temple terrace, in the soft light of the throbbing stars.

He lived and moved under the pressure of an exaltation of soul against which "the cords of Adam" labored painfully. The soul of the boy wrestled with the Herculean mission of the God-man; it was Divine Love driving Him on with all the impetuous force of His young soul. No wonder the flames of the holy conflict blazed from the depths of His lustrous eyes, and burned in the tones of His low and modulated voice, and smote the hearts of those stern old men, till the pallor of His young

face was a thing to dream of in years to come, a dream to lie forever between them and the script of the Inspired Page.

But Mary and Joseph were traveling onward from Jerusalem, their eyes searching each group of pilgrims, their hearts longing for a sight of the adorable Presence, which as yet had never been absent from their side.

Mary tells her tremulous heart that the young, eager feet have carried Him far ahead with the distant leaders of the caravan, and Joseph believes He will wait for them or return before long. So they lift their voices with the multitude and chant, along the winding way, the psalms of the Return. Mary's sweet voice trembles as she says: "He swore to the Lord . . . If I shall give sleep to my eyes, or slumber to my eyelids, or rest to my temples: until I find out a place for the Lord, a tabernacle for the God of Jacob . . . We will adore in the place where His feet have stood."¹ Her troubled eyes search Joseph's face for reassurance against the vague fear which haunts her Mother-breast. Jesus is not wont to leave them without word. There is a feeling in Mary's heart that the Boy is suffering, in pain, that He is enduring danger; and her soul is poised above an abyss of darkness which Joseph's comfort cannot penetrate nor his love dispel.

The Child is not at Beeroth. Mary searches among the fountains and upon the hills where she and Jesus kept their lovely vigil not long since; and as His words come back to her once more, her soul goes down into the chill shadows of a nameless dread, in this her first dark hour of dereliction.

Weary and suffering, Joseph and Mary hasten back

¹ Ps. 131:2, 4-5, 7.

to Jerusalem in the still hours of descending night. Joseph realizes only too well the dangers the Child may incur from the agitated state of the country, under the fierce insurrection of Sadoc and Judas the Gaulonite, then in progress; and his strong heart labors with Mary's own under this unwonted visitation of God. Out of the depths they cry unto Him that He may be attentive to the voice of their supplication. And God, from the heights of the mighty heavens, looks down upon them in His infinite tenderness—that tenderness whereof, in the darkness of trouble, we catch fleeting but intoxicating glimpses that keep us from sinking beneath the waters of despair.

It was a crushing trial to these holy ones of God's ardent predilection. Every moment was a crucifixion to the Mother's heart. Every throb of her blood another scourge, another nail, another thorn within its tender flesh. It was a martyrdom which left its glorious scars to cry aloud their jubilees from the heights of bliss.

FINDING JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

WHEN shall we learn the might and the majesty of the claim of God? When shall we learn the literal insignificance of all earthly claims against it? O little and limited mind of man! How short is thy vision, how restricted thy compass.

The vast, the unattainable, the unsearchable greatness of God. And yet each claim of father and mother, brother and sister, lover and friend, husband and wife, rests upon Him, is sanctified and ennobled by our union with Him, and our complete, most ready, and unquestioning subjection to His Will. If He leads our dear ones whither we may not follow, it is but a temporary swerving from our path, and we trust to meet them yonder where the Saviour waits to unite us with ever closer and holier bonds.

Our hearts cry out and lift their claims to Heaven, and rebel against the agony of God's seeming disregard. But silence holds in its bosom a deeper wisdom than we can comprehend, a deeper gladness for our anguish than we shall ever fathom. It bids us lift our faith above our claim and bide the time when He shall crown it with the bliss of vision. . . .

So now the Child lays upon His Mother's heart the burden of her pain, knowing that He shall heal it in

the days to come and draw from it diviner sweetness for the crushing agony of that weight which for the present bears it down.

On that last night of Mary's and Joseph's search in Jerusalem, the Boy's own Heart must have sorely ached for those who were agonized with and because of Him. Never a pang passed unheeded in that perfect Heart of Christ, nor a sorrow unharbored in its gentle love. As He lay unseen in a temple nook, above the silence of the sleeping city, weary with the strain of His overcharged soul and the strong tension of His young mind, what would He not have given in this hour of abandonment, for the comfort of Mary's arms, and the Mother-lap in which to pillow His weary head. What would He not have given for Mary's quick and comprehensive intuition of the love and pain, the despondency and exaltation that ebbed and flowed in Him, while the stars looked mutely on and His Father's angels covered Him with their wings.

Prone upon the stone pavement, with His burning brow buried in His arms, the Boy wrestled with the longing of nature and laid His trouble at the Father's feet, that many a lonely and desolate boy in days to come might find it there and be comforted. At last He slept with Mary's name upon His lips, praying that the Father comfort her where He Himself might not, and sanctify unto her the anguish of her soul and His.

* * *

"Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing."¹

The pain of the Mother-heart breaks the solemn hush of the Beth-Midrash. Mary is entirely oblivious

¹ Luke 2:48.

of the august and imposing spectacle of those mighty ones in Israel. Her troubled eyes fall upon the beloved figure of her Son, and all the world vanishes before the holy tempest of her mingled love and sorrow and joy.

It is the cry of long-pent-up anguish, the anguish of unbearably tried love, the anguish in which struggles a mighty joy, divine and human, both sacred, both tenderly welcome to the heart of Mary's Child.

Should not the pain of Mary's heart be laid bare to Mary's Son? Should not His ear be made acquainted with the sweet reproach of love than which no greater ever reigned in mother-breast? Should not these wise men gauge the greatness of the sacrifice the Boy has made for the glory and service of Yahweh by the wounding of such a love as Mary's? What child could abandon such love were He not consumed with the supreme love of the Almighty Father, and guided across the anguish of a mother-heart to the stormy heights of the mission of the Messiah? Weep, Mary, in the sight of the mighty ones of the earth, for God counts every tear a tribute of love to the will of thy Divine Son.

Mary does not question the Boy's motive. She knows He is God, and therefore can do nothing amiss. But, aside from the involuntary cry of her human heart, her anguish pleads for that knowledge which is sure to ease it of its keenest pang. She craves the comfort that only Jesus can give her; her heart is hungry from the travail of its sorrow and it longs for the appeasing love of Jesus, her God. Had He not taught her, as He has taught us, to complain to Him, to give insistent voice to those soft reproaches which love knows how to fashion from the throes of its consuming ardor? Had He

not taught her that all of heaven reigned within the flesh with which she had clothed Him, and was *her Heaven*, as it was her flesh?

It was thus that Mary appealed to her distress, by the rights which He had conferred upon her; the rights of her Queenship in that Divine Heart, as well as of her Motherhood. It was a question full of eager trust as well as of reproach. She knew that Jesus would not have suffered His father and herself to seek Him sorrowing were He not impelled by some superior motive.

Mary also knew that "His Father's business" was the one absorbing passion of her Boy's soul. But she knew that for years to come He was to live in silent preparation for the toils of the ministry, in the seclusion of Nazareth. This departure from the beaten track, this placing Himself at the mercy of the multitude from which He had hitherto so assiduously screened Himself startled and bewildered her watchful heart. How could the world be so blind to that which was so clearly resplendent to her adoring eyes? Mary's heart trembled with the fear of betrayal. Who knows but there was a loving subterfuge in her impulse to cloak the Child from the eyes of the Sanhedrin with the parentage of herself and the "carpenter" from Galilee, and all the sweet natural impulse of her mother-love?

Joseph leaves it all in Mary's hands. The patient pain is welling in his heart; he has borne the pangs of responsibility and the torment of anxiety with the great, noble tolerance which is the flower of his sanctity. Mary's Motherhood, Mary's love, Mary's knowledge of the heart of Jesus will solve all difficulties and win the Child once more to the little home in Galilee. What

Divine intimacies in that holy home the words of Mary reveal to us—"Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing."

As Jesus turns to her, His face glows with the subdued radiance of the triumph of Eternal Truth, and Mary's lips quiver with the greatness of her rapture and her hand trembles as it rests upon the tumult of her heart. What an immense tenderness of love must have added its light to the face of Jesus as He questioned her:

"How is it that you have sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"²

Gently the Boy reminds His mother that surely, if He strays from her side, He is to be sought only in His Father's house, whither He is drawn by His Father's will. What that will is He could not explain to Mary in the publicity of the Temple; and therefore: "They understood not the word that He spoke unto them."³ But the note of Divine authority manifested itself in His voice and bearing.

Mary and Joseph were spellbound, "And seeing Him, they wondered." But they were thrilled, too, with the power of His supernatural strength and beauty, even as the wise men of Israel had fallen captive, heart and intellect, to His charm. It was one of those revelations which illumine those who live close to the heart of Jesus, and which silence all speech in mute and humble adoration.

In silence, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph withdrew from the presence of the wise men and took their way back to Galilee. It was a pregnant silence for sages and saints, for the words of Jesus were pondered, not only in Mary's heart, but in the secrecy of the councils of

² *Ibid.* 49.

³ *Ibid.* 50.

Israel. The wise men looked into one another's eyes, with earnest and troubled gaze. They rolled up the scroll of the Sacred Script and laid it away with lingering hand. In silence they parted in the shadow of the Temple, burdened with unwelcome doubts and haunting fears. Slowly they went their way to ponder long the strange wisdom of the stranger Child.

And the Child, with His hand clasped tight in Mary's, and smiling up at her, caught furtive beams of the tearful joy which flashed from her lovely eyes as the storm of her pain subsided and her fears fled away. How short the way; how lovely the colored mountains. How fresh and billowy the young corn, as it yielded to the sweep of a south wind and the soft thunder of a flight of stately storks across the golden spears.

The world is all God's, and all lovely with the loveliness of His touch, when we walk with Him in the enduring freshness of His love.

25

GROWTH IN WISDOM, AGE, AND GRACE

TOWARD evening of the third day the little group of travelers cross the plain of Jezreel and, mounting a steep path through a cleft in the foot hills, reach the lovely valley which leads into Nazareth.

The Boy's eyes fill with delight as He watches the flitting glory of the flamingo and the roller-bird flashing, "like a living sapphire," across the sunset. His tired feet dip into the cool springs of the valley and are buried deep in the thymy sweetness of the hills, until through the ghostly shadows gleam the white houses of the little town, "like a handful of pearls in a goblet of emerald." So St. Jerome delightfully describes them.

Here the Son of God will spend eighteen more years in obscurity, subjection, and obedience. "He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them."¹ His subjection, now, is entirely voluntary, since He has reached legal majority; in Eastern lands maturity is reached at an early age. In this happy seclusion, the intimate intercourse of the Holy Family is resumed, with the great hills folding back around them, like the leaves of a rose, whose golden heart is the Hidden Life of Nazareth.

¹ Luke 2:51.

What lovelier resting place for the sanctuary of the boyhood and youth of Christ than this city of Galilee? What earthly spot could more enticingly lift its flower-chalice from the secrecy of the hills for the gathering of fondest, holiest memories, and tenderest associations with the Heavenly Child?

It was in this subjection to Mary and Joseph, unceasingly practised here, that Jesus merited for us the increase of grace and wisdom which was to replenish the barrenness of our souls. He manifested and exercised it for us in proportion as He grew in age and as the circumstances of His life called it forth.

When we think of every thought, word, and deed in the daily life of Jesus—each perfect, each infinitely meritorious, each shrined in the complacency of the Father's eyes and each laden with its special grace and blessing—a new world of unlimited richness and beauty rises. It is ours. We look and dream and feed our soul upon it. Then, glancing at our own poor hoard of merit, we smilingly cast it into these great depths, knowing it will be lost and yet found, multiplied and glorified in Him.

"And Jesus advanced in wisdom, and age, and grace with God and man."²

Theologians speak of a triple knowledge possessed by Christ. The first is that of the Beatific Vision, for He beheld God face to face. The second is known as "infused" knowledge. In neither of these ways could He be said to have "advanced in wisdom," for both were perfect in Him from the beginning. Yet, because He only gradually gave external manifestation of the wisdom which was from the first infused into His soul, He could be said to have outwardly advanced in wisdom

² *Ibid.* 52.

before men, even in proportion as He advanced in age.

But there is a third kind of wisdom in which He did advance in the full sense of the word. This was "acquired" or "experimental" wisdom. Though by the *beatific* wisdom Christ knew all things from the first moment of His existence, and though in His *infused* knowledge He was from the first absolutely perfect and so could not increase, yet by *experience* He could still constantly gain a new acquired knowledge of the things about Him. Experience, of its very nature, is gradual.

"Therefore," writes St. Thomas, "Christ did not from the beginning know all things, but gradually, and after some time, namely, in perfect age. This is plain from the fact that the Evangelist groups together the statements that He advanced in wisdom and age."⁸

Christ not only received new sense experiences, but also acquired new experimental knowledge. The gradual outward manifestations of His infused knowledge would further account for the progressive external development described throughout these chapters.

For understanding this, we have the beautiful comparison of the sun whose light never increases in reality, yet whose beams are constantly changing as they appear to us. We see them: rosy in the early dawn, softly mellow with the breaking day, golden in the rich effulgence of the morning sky, splendidous through the mounting hours, and dazzling bright in the noonday heavens. In itself the sun has undergone no change, its own full radiance has ever been the same, though only increasingly beheld by us. So the infused knowledge of Christ, ever the same, was only slowly manifested, from the first endearing prattle of His childish years to the

⁸ 3 p., q. 12, art. 2, ad 1.

brilliant wisdom of His ripened manhood, when men said wonderingly to one another: "Never yet man spoke like unto this Man."

Similarly, there could be no internal growth of grace in the soul of Christ. He advanced in grace as He advanced in infused knowledge, by manifesting ever more fully that plenitude which He possessed from the beginning. Throughout His life He showed forth by degrees the virtues becoming Him as child, as boy, as youth, and as ideal man. But within His Soul grace remained the same. Never was He wanting in the full beauty and richness of its perfection.

* * *

It is a discipline for Mary to suffer the relinquishment of those long sweet hours of solitary companionship with her Boy; it is discipline for Joseph to assume the dread, though adorable, task of teaching the Son of God the rude trade of a humble carpenter; it is a discipline for Jesus to adapt His divine faculties to the toil and drudgery of the workshop, and come, as now He must, into closer contact with the common, sordid elements of fallen human nature, involving much that must be painful to the exquisite purity of His Sacred Heart. He is to exercise perfect control of every repulsion and aversion, every gesture and expression, and so merit for us during the eighteen years of hidden sanctity in the discipline of Nazareth those special graces whereof we stand in need during all our daily life.

Jesus is not only to endure all this with the heroism of a patient heart, but He is to stretch out His pure young hands, with their hidden spirit of healing, to remedy the sin and misery of troubled lives. He is to

touch men with the secret grace which is light to the understanding and strength to the will and a strong sweet impulse in the ways of God. He is to draw near to them in the touching trust of youth, which appeals more strongly than the wisdom of age to the best and noblest instincts of the human heart, and smile into the faces of these Nazarenes His own sunny smile in which Heaven seems to rest.

Many a hard and sinful hand will be gently laid upon that stainless brow of the Boy Christ, while troubled eyes look long and wistfully into the pure face which does not shrink from the sullied touch, but fills the soul of the wearied sinner with strange deep yearnings for the radiant beauty of the perfect life. Jesus will pray to the Father for all those needy souls and leave the blessing of His love behind.

If we have walked in sinful ways, and the Holy Child should come in the shadows of the night, we would also dare to press our hand upon His brow and turn the pure face to our own, that we might breathe its healing and its balm. We would gaze into the limpid depths of its angelic beauty, until our heart melts in an anguish of remorse, and our soul lies captive at His blessed feet.

What if our first impulse be to shrink and cower at the mute and trustful love of His lifted eyes. It is a good pain; the pain of a holy shame; a pain that will wring from our soul its last remnant of pride, vainglory, and self-love, that it may be His own, pliant and pure for His beautifying touch. We need not fear that He will draw away, that His pain will shrink from ours, that His face will flush with our shame, and His brow contract with the fever of our guilty hand. His innocence

is the white shield of His knowledge, His love will triumph over His woe, and we shall find in His face only the inspiration of the higher life and the light of the Spirit of God.

26

THE JUST MAN JOSEPH

IT IS not difficult to picture the little workshop in which Jesus toiled with Joseph. There was a sunny corner at the back which looked out upon the hills, where the Boy had His bench and tools, and where Joseph's eyes would often wander to watch the sunbeams weaving a halo in His golden hair.

There, too, he would meet the gaze of eyes filled with the tender thoughts of a fresh young soul.

Father Faber tells us how the hand of Joseph lay upon the hand of God, guiding it in its self-appointed task. Our soul is hushed in mighty awe and wonder, as we look upon the little hand that suffers itself to be pressed and guided over the rough board by Joseph's hard and toilworn fingers. Then, as we raise our eyes, we watch in Joseph's calm and saintly face the flush of many and great thoughts, and wonder at the silent mastery of his will, at the simple fidelity of his patient heart to the common duties of daily life.

It must have cost unceasing effort for Joseph, son of kings and foster-father to the King of kings, to train himself to such fidelity in the humble tasks of the life whereby the Son of God was to fulfil His destiny. He looked upon the royal hands of God, as they struggled with the rough work and bore their bruises and their

soil; he looked upon the young shoulders carrying their burden of wood and tools, the coarse garments and the sweet flushed face which bent above the lowly work; and he saw, within, the glory and majesty of the King's Son, the unspeakable beauty of His servitude and humiliation in the strong, fair toils of love.

No scepter lay in those little hands; no crown was on His head; no ermine robes hung from His shoulders —yet He was every inch the King's Son! On His face was visible the unruffled sweetness and gentle dignity of a soul perfectly at peace, and the unbroken consciousness of the Royalty which reigned within. Time and again the soul of Joseph reached out to serve where it should command, and fell in gentle confusion under the apparently unconscious gaze of the Divine Son. Then Joseph would turn and busy himself about the shop, while the Boy worked on in the silence of His father's love.

There were times also when the two drew near each other in the fashioning of their work, and drifted into talk of Mary: Mary's sweetness, the lovely charm of her gracious ways, the radiant smile that lighted up her face as they turned up the little walk and found her in the glory of the setting sun. And Jesus would tell His father of the many pretty ways in which she sought to give Him unexpected pleasure; of the tales she told Him, in inspired and glowing words, of the heroes of His race, the warriors of Israel, and the great deeds of the Persian wars; how she wove about them her own lovely fancies, and drew from them the Father's truths; how she pictured Esther to Him reigning by the might of virtue, and Judith conquering for her people and bringing them salvation through her valiant strength of

soul. Joseph, then, would tell in turn how she drew her words of wisdom and burning love from the secret treasures of her own most wonderful heart and made those old tales live afresh in the strong and heavenly life that flowed within her soul. Then the two would fall into a long silence, lost in the love and wonders of Mary; and each would read in his own way the deepening characters and hidden riches of her perfect being.

The simple, steadfast silence of Joseph and his unquestioning adherence to the line of conduct which the Holy Spirit inspired were tested and tried day by day more deeply, as the Boy grew in grace and wisdom and entered more closely into His father's loving heart. All day long the two worked in the intimacy of their toil, and thought and deed sprang up under the same impulse and followed the same supreme end.

It was the profound consciousness of his unworthiness which frequently sealed the lips of Joseph, for he was "a just man," and humility is but a true appreciation of our relationship to God. None the less, the great man's soul would press against the bar, yearning for hidden and holy things as his forefathers yearned for the milk and honey of the Promised Land. All through that heroic silence the divine eyes of the quiet Boy were fixed with infinite content and love upon the aspiring soul and toiling hands of His earthly father, rejoicing in His great strides heavenward along strenuous ways of sanctity toward the joy and glory that awaited him, in the kingdom of the Just.

Mary, also, knew something of that hidden struggle. And when the Child had gone to rest, weary with the hard day's toil, she drew nearer to her spouse and whispered the sweet comfort of her loving heart to allay

the tired forces of his patient soul. That whisper bore with it, like "the north wind and the south wind" of the Canticle, all the strength and vigor and fragrance of the aromatical spices in the garden of the Beloved. Under this sacred spell his tense soul would relax, in perfect rhythm with the gentle music of Mary's harmonious spirit, and the just man rested in the peace of God.

Little is required—a delicate touch suffices to time a perfect instrument whose strings have slipped through constant pressure of the human hand. How skilled was Mary's hand, how light her touch, how exquisite the harmony she drew from the yielding strings of that love-laden instrument, the soul of her virginal spouse. Her fair hand lingered in the rapture of those holy chants, while God smiled and the angels listened.

In all the years of close companionship between Mary and Joseph, through every test of pain and joy, amid the hardships of exile and the drudgery of daily life, the wonder of their perfect love never waned, its glowing colors never faded, its charm never vanished, its existence never fell to the colorless level of the commonplace. And the reason was clear to see. It sprang from the very bosom of God, flowing thence into human channels. It had but one Source and one mode of existence. It was celestially free from the trammels of the flesh and lived in the crystalline stability of spiritual light, it knew not age nor suffered the shadow of decline.

Joseph's quiet strength of soul, manifested in endurance of body, stability of temperament, and the patience of a disciplined character, was a constant source of admiration to his holy spouse. Her love went out to him in a sweet dependence, such as only the strong and self-reliant can call forth and fully appreciate; which

made his responsibilities light and his anxieties bearable, and doubled his strength in the heat of conflict and his joy in time of peace. It kept sweet and active the hidden springs of tenderness in Joseph's manly nature, that Mary's lips might never thirst, and that the wounds she suffered from contact with the world might steep their fever in the healing waters of his love. And Mary drank and thanked God for the wondrous fashioning of that great soul of Joseph, whose depths, filled with the riches of God, her love discovered day by day. They were one in spirit and one in God. While Mary bestowed upon him the tenderness of her dependence, Joseph conferred upon her the comfort of his strength. In all things, that quiet interchange of love constantly operated in this ideal world.

With each day Joseph grew more dear to Mary's heart. As the years flowed on, so quietly, so undiversified in outward events, so rich in the unfolding of the spiritual life which lay lapped upon the glimmering tide of the Holy Child's Divinity, Mary learned to love more deeply the saintly soul of Joseph. The rarely beautiful character of his mission and the perfection of his conformity with its grandly simple requirements flooded her heart with a reverent affection, and opened noble vistas into the great soul which seemed in its humility to hide its beauty from its own unstartled consciousness.

As her love looked out from Mary's eyes, Joseph would lay her slender hand upon his own rough palm, and remind her humbly that as hers was created for the service of the Infant God, so was his made to labor for the King and Queen of Heaven. Its toil was that which from all eternity had been decreed and bore the blessing and the glory of the eternal years. And Mary told

him it was fashioned after the Father's own, whose patience and goodness, whose beauty and strength were traced in every rugged line. In years to come the toiling world might see and ponder that hand of Joseph, and joyously lay its hand in his for faithful help and guidance.

About them hovered the sense of being guided, silently, but irresistibly, in thought and deed, by the Holy Child. In His absolute subjection was an underlying power which radiated from His Divine Personality, and exercised its quiet force upon their highly spiritual life.

As the moon, in a serene and lofty sky, governs the sweep of the mighty tides, yet yields to them the fulness of its silver beauty till all the waters gleam from coast to coast, so the life of the Divine Child, in its beauty and supernatural light, shone ever more resplendent over the waters of their souls, until that beauty became a living force to draw them almost irresistibly along the high and perfect way of God's Will. Their liberty, indeed, remained, that they might serve God freely, but they were, in its most profound sense, captured and drawn by the Divinity in Christ that is wisdom as well as loveliness, providence as well as sweetness, harmony as well as light, and which contains eminently all virtues in the fulness of their splendor.

As these holy souls expanded to the power of the Divine Presence and grew more yielding to Its tranquil sway, they mirrored ever more perfectly that Divine Principle which governs yet is governed by its own most perfect law.

Happy Mary! Happy Joseph! to be so joined in that mutual love of holy wedlock whose bond was the Spirit of God, the Divine Spirit of Love Itself. Only thus can

we have the perfection of the Christian home, in which the children whom God may grant shall preciously grow up in the likeness of the Christ Child, with the love of the Saviour deep in their hearts and constantly advancing like Him "in wisdom and age and grace with God and men."

But there were times when Mary and Joseph looked forward together to the day when the silence of those boyish lips of Christ should at last be broken and His words would flood the world with new revelations of beauty and truth. They knew not how it would all come about, yet they knew that His victory was secure; they knew that the light of Truth would kindle and burn, and would blaze forth under the quiet power of the Hidden Hand. And Mary knew, in their mutual love, how the shadow of the Great Sacrifice hung over them, for the vision of the Lamb of God, immolated for us, not seldom shone in the gentle face of Jesus to wring the hearts that held Him close in their adoring love. This, too, it was which drew them together ever more intimately.

The love of Mary and Joseph, centered as it was in Christ alone, must for all time be the model of every wedded love which maid and man shall pledge each other, that it may last through life, and its fruit may be garnered up for them unto all eternity.

27

THE DEATH OF JOSEPH

AS JESUS grew to manhood a strong, active comradeship sprang up between Him and His foster father.

Friendship, with the grace of perfect freedom, lay its consecrating touch upon paternal and filial love, and broke down those necessary and inevitable barriers between age and youth, authority and subjection. The love of personal choice affiliated itself with the love of nature, making one of the most perfect relationships known to the human heart. There was the thrill of a new joy in the interchange of confidence, of work and leisure time, of sorrow and of joy; the knowledge of perfect understanding added to the old trust; the silent delight of meeting upon equal ground; a gratitude both humble and proud, and a love both reverent and unrestrained.

Aside from the affairs of their own humble little kingdom of the workshop, Jesus and Joseph considered the affairs of the Heavenly Kingdom. Here, as Joseph's years drew to their close, Son turned counselor to father, and in filial love, through secret ways and by means divine, gently and reverently led him from the poverty and trial of the earthly realm to the riches and reward of Heaven. With the living hope of Eternal Beatitude burning in the soul of Joseph, Christ was to send him on before, not as yet to enter the Celestial

City, but to await His coming. For no one could now enter the Eternal Portals until these were flung wide at the triumphant advent of the King of kings, Victor over sin and death, and ascending into glory with His saints.

He sent him on before. What tenderness in the sending; what light to guide him through the shadows of death; what safety, with the toil-worn hands of Joseph in the warm, strong hand of Jesus. What comfort in this prayer and promise for the weary soul to lean upon.

A short time of waiting with the Patriarchs and Prophets of old, and he would look at last upon that Heaven which had really lived beside him, behind walls of flesh, for all those years. Its beauty had flashed with blinding glory upon his veiled eyes; its harmonies, muffled yet exquisitely suggestive, had fallen upon his ears. Near as it had all been to him in those long loving years, how suddenly near, with a thrilling nearness, must it have seemed now, as death let down the mortal bars, softly, one by one, and the spirit trembled onward through the breathless dawn into that vast realm of the just of all the ages, who there were awaiting the coming of the Saviour God, his own Foster Son, of Whom he should bring to them authentic word.

A few more years, and the ineffable splendors of the Soul of Christ, descending from Calvary, would thrill these regions of the saints, and they would issue forth to participate with Him forever in the triumph of His Risen Glory. How lofty then and near to Christ forevermore would be the place of Joseph. Still a few more years, and Mary, too, would once more be united with Jesus and with Him, and that Trinity of Earth would be resplendently enthroned in the eternal joys of Heaven.

Then would he know the deep, full beatitude of the eternal embrace of the Living Arms of God. Then, at last, would he see Him face to face, and not merely through the veils of that Humanity in which he had known Him here below.

Oh, that wonderful knowledge of God granted to His saints in Heaven, that knowledge drawn from vision and possession, where faith and hope slip away forever and love alone remains, where God is all in all!

The spirit of the just man passed from earth, followed by the loving gaze of Jesus and Mary, with the kiss of God and His Blessed Mother to seal his lips till they should be loosed again to chant the praises of Eternal Love.

There had been no death in all the world so favored as that of Joseph. God was with him in the flesh to minister to every need of human weakness; and He was with him in the lethargy of the soul, to lay His hand upon its loosening bonds. There was no painful struggle to keep the wings of the spirit poised in the Presence of its God. God was there in human form; and surely, in this holiest of all the hours of Joseph's life, Heaven shone through the eyes of Jesus as never dying eyes beheld It on earth before. In that perfect joy, Mary, too, participated, while the tender mutual love of two virgin hearts received its last ardent and glorifying touch. Human love was crowned in the splendor of the love of God.

* * *

Gently Jesus lays His hand upon Mary's bowed head and softly whispers her dear name through the holy silence.

Ah, the blessed, comforting, life-giving whisper of

God. Mary looks up into the face of Jesus, and rises with a startled joy.

There is constantly something new, something unexpected, something which enraptures the heart in the exquisite grace and perfection of God's consolations and endearments during trial. There is no earthly joy that can compare with them, for they are born of Heaven and bear no resemblance to anything we have seen or heard. It is God, and God's way; a way as infinitely various as it is invariably perfect, and which startles because it opens new and unexpected deeps, not only into our knowledge of God Himself, but into our relationship with Him. All this, in immeasurable degree, must Mary have experienced in that blessed moment of Christ's consolation, as she mourned the passing from her earthly life of him who had shared her burdens and her joys, all sacred, all holy, and who had been to her the object of the most saintly love of man and wife this earth has ever known.

There was new love and beauty for Mary in the face of Jesus. Her pure soul trembled through her grief at His Divine call. Within the glory of His countenance dawned for her a vision of the new life He had prepared, when, alone with Him, He was to be to her what He had never been before. The memory of her holy spouse would linger on like an odor of sweetness, a treasure of beauty, within her soul, until she should be reunited eternally with him; but in the meantime Jesus in His affection would even more wonderfully clothe her, as "a bride adorned for the Bridegroom," the stars of His glory upon her brow, and the moon of His love beneath her feet.

They laid their dead to rest, his body under the lilies

of Galilee and his royal soul in "the bosom of Abraham," until Christ Himself in His hour of triumph should lead him to his great reward.

With her head upon the Heart of Jesus, Mary listens to the promise: "I am the Resurrection and the Life!" And as she hears His words, she listens also to the strong, deep, throbbing of that Life, her own life cradled upon its mighty pulse and seeming to lie in touch with the universal life of creation. Life. God. Jesus. She possesses all in Him as we, too, may draw the fulness of all life and love and joy from the Divine Heart of the Saviour Christ.

Mary turns from the bewildering glory of her ecstasy to look again on the quiet face of the dead; and Jesus once more whispers to her the unspoken thought: "I am the Resurrection!"

We must sleep to wake; die to live. For the souls of the elect, death is a transition; and in the last day the Son of God will Himself reanimate the dormant substance of their bodies and transmute them into the wonder of "the body glorified." Body and soul, they shall show forth resplendently as stars through all eternity the glory of their Creator.

If we could really see, as Mary saw in all the brightness of the supernatural light and truth of Jesus, that our dead who died in Christ really but sleep in the sweet and watchful care of God, that body as well as soul is destined to shadow forth His glory, we should then grow truly wise in grief, content in pain, and find in Jesus' arms all and even more than we have lost.

As Mary lay upon the breast of Jesus, He unfolded to her the minor meanings of the life of Joseph, and she saw more and more clearly the perfect roundness

and completeness of it all. She followed the divine finger as it traced the full sum of Joseph's mortal existence within the limits of its natural term, all rarely perfect, symmetrical, harmonious. And there, in ever more glorious and more comprehensive outline, she saw the relations of that life to God. She understood more fully than ever the supernatural purposes constantly realized in Joseph's faithful correspondence with the silent, hidden, but luminous operation of divine grace.

The planet holds the satellite with a resistless, invisible power, keeping its motions in order with the perfect law of its orbit, governing its every revolution and endowing it with its celestial light. The soul of Joseph, by free correspondence of its will, no less faithfully traced its course of life about a central Orb, the Sun of Divine Love. Now, as the Spirit of Death swept clear from the heaven of Mary's eyes the veils and shadows of earth, she beheld how that soul of Joseph had continually been growing in splendor and magnitude. And she looked at Jesus, her eyes alight with the pure joy and beauty of her vision, for He Himself had wiped away her tears and had refreshed her with the living waters of eternal life.

Short was the parting with her beloved; the reunion would be eternal. Precious, indeed, in the sight of God is the death of His saints.

May we never fail each day to repeat that beautiful prayer:

Jesus! Mary! Joseph!
I give you my heart and my soul!

Jesus! Mary! Joseph!
Assist me at the hour of my death!

Jesus! Mary! Joseph!
May I die in your sweet embrace!

28

HER SON: HER GOD

AS DAY draws to its close and all the busy sounds of the village gather about the hearth-stones of the cottage homes, Mary's song grows softer and softer with the sweetness of expectant love, and her deft hands make ready for the coming of Jesus. Her eyes study every detail upon which His eyes will rest, and her hand lingers on what His hand will touch. She labors to give Him that secret comfort in which His weariness may find relief while His soul is free to climb the eternal hills.

As the moments lag, Mary reverently lifts the curtains of His simple room and smooths once more the rude couch whereon the Son of God shall find His humble rest. She gently mourns the day when she cradled His little tenderness in the warm sweet comfort of her breast and cooed the sorrow from His Baby-heart.

But the shadows grow heavy between those days and these, and chill with the forecast of that other couch which waits beyond the hills of Juda in the dim silence of an empty tomb. Vague forms of kneeling angels limn themselves in the deadly gloom, and droop about the heart of Mary, to stir the sword sheathed in her mother-breast.

Suddenly she turns. Her trained ear catches the soft

fall of feet. Already His hand is on the latch, but there is a moment's pause as His eyes are raised to the kingdom of His Father. He enters, laying down His tools, and silently takes her in His arms. Mary wonders, while she rests against His heart, how that kingdom beyond the stars can hold a more resplendent beauty and diviner joy than this. There is no need of words as she raises her pillowled head and looks into His tenderly smiling eyes. Mary's heart is an open script to them.

He is her God from Whose thought she issued, from Whom she has her being, upon Whose will her soul is poised in an ecstasy of dread delight. He is her God Who rules and governs her, Who possesses her with the power of Divinity. And yet she sees that same power, self-contained, lie as if passive at *her* will, and yield to her behest that which her spirit craves.

Jesus looks down into the peace and bliss of her hallowed face and tells how His love so abides in her that henceforth all nations may gather about and call her blessed, and may seek Him through the glory of her peerless life.

Day by day He notes in her the wonderful unfolding of heart and soul, the blossoming of an immortal flower. Mary stands responsive to His love, yielding up to the gentle pressure of His grace the deepest, sweetest secrets of her being. And then, at last, the pure eyes lift the burden of their love, and there is the light of God upon them, while the pure lips murmur: "Lord, I am not worthy!"

As Mary bows her head, the words from the Book of Esther come to mind: "And as she held her peace, he took the golden scepter, and laid it upon her neck, and kissed her, and said: 'Why dost thou not speak to me?'

She answered: 'I saw thee, my lord, . . . and my heart was troubled for fear of thy majesty.' "¹

Mary's heart and intellect followed with unwavering fidelity the revelations of God's guiding light. Through the complexities of flesh and spirit, the weariness and harassment at times of a straitened family life, as well as the ever-present tragedy of the Redemption, Mary walked in simple security, whithersoever the divine light guided her. In all the little sufferings of poverty and deprivation, which formed the stern sweet discipline of the Hidden Life, Mary learned the secret way to the higher joys which they contained. And when with His gentle smile, Jesus slipped His empty, toil-worn hand into the tender comfort of her own, and the beautiful weary face stooped for her caressing touch, Mary drew Him silently to the little hearth, knowing that the spiritual banquet which they would share together would silence the flesh and chasten it with abounding grace.

How different from the banqueting of the world were those spiritual feasts of Mary, side by side with Jesus. The gate of the garden of the Beloved was set ajar, and the ever new, refreshing world of its delights unveiled itself for her delectation.

That garden was indeed for Mary the illimitable mind of God, and she walked its pathways hand in hand with the Incarnate Word, contemplating through Him the sublime beauty of its activities, the exquisite adjustment of its perfections, and the depths of its mysteries. Above all, she saw there the vast sun-drenched, grace-inundated world of love in which reigns the heavenly providence behind every deed of the Creative Hand.

¹ Esther 15:15-16.

It was that Hand which now closed softly upon her own as His Spirit closed upon her soul. What wonder that the babble and distractions of the busy world lay hushed outside the splendor of those golden bars; and that Mary walked, hand in hand, and all in all with Jesus.

To keep "the eyes of her heart" fixed upon Jesus during those holy hours of mental prayer was no effort for Mary. There were no distractions strong enough to lure her from the absorbing beauty of the face of God or the sweetness of His converse. The eyes of her body and the eyes of her soul feasted uninterruptedly, and their hunger was filled.

There are times when in the midst of fervor, our thoughts slip unaware away from the empire of our will, and Christ Himself recalls them, with all the patience of the Good Shepherd in search of His wandering sheep. We feel His presence steal about us like a heavenly atmosphere; the trail of His garments gently drawn across our feet; the faint sweet fragrance of His breath upon our cheek; a sudden radiance of supernatural light upon our soul; the cool, sure touch of His kiss of peace upon our lips, or the subtle touch of His hand upon our brow. Mary's thoughts might wander too, and the Shepherd seek them as He seeks our own, but it was always within the pasture of His love.

In these communings with the Beloved was there a sweet wilfulness with which she sought to veil from His eyes the dread vision of His Passion and the tragic retribution of man's iniquity which must engulf Him in unspeakable woe? Did she seek, with the quick inspiration of her womanly heart and an exquisite delicacy of spiritual intuition, to divert Him with the charm of

her love and the seraphic ardor of her worship, to woo Him with the joy of her perfect soul?

Not in vain, for thirty years, had she studied the face of Jesus. She knew every line, every lineament. She read every fleeting emotion, every abiding trait that depicted itself in the majestic beauty of His countenance. And using all the deftness of her human and spiritual affection, she ruled, through the dear prerogative by which Christ Himself was voluntarily "subject" to her, with the golden scepter of her Queenly love, while Jesus, smiling, yielded to her will and sipped the cup of comfort from her hand.

What a thousand traits of endearing emotions are contained in that brief Scripture line assuring us that He was subject to her. In the tender helplessness of His infancy, in the impulsive vigor of His youth, in the full maturity of His manhood, He is still subject to her sweet dominion. There was but one exception, the Temple scene, when He was called from on high and must be about His Father's business.

In Queen and Subject all was love. How sweet her tyranny over the heart of Jesus, how generous and joyous His submission. For does she not but anticipate His every wish and forestall His every action? Are not her thoughts and words, her gentle commands and tender endearments, inspired by Jesus Himself? Is she not the secret, yielding instrument of His inspirations, and yet the actual sovereign of those thirty years of His Hidden Life? And Jesus never contradicted. There was no need, no possibility. Her commands themselves were worship, and "the Lord of all things loved her."

JESUS OF NAZARETH

CHRIST, as Man and God, was never idle. His mission began with the first moment of His Incarnation and found incessant activity among the souls He had come to save. He prayed and worked, and upon those bases founded the whole of Christian life. But what must have been the power of His own prayer and the perfection of His works.

Somehow the Hidden Life is in a most especial manner a subject of contemplation for lovers of Christ. He called upon apostles and disciples to serve as instruments for the bestowal and interpretation of His Word. But in the deep and silent Hidden Life, recorded "not upon tablets of stone but upon the tablets of the heart," He has left an additional, more intimate world of love for eyes that search to penetrate the very soul of Christ.

If we live upon the surface of His life we may be His friends, admirers, brothers even, but never in the supreme sense of that word, His lovers. To understand, within the limits of our power, the consuming love which broke forth from time to time during the brief years of His ministry, we should study its course through the long years of its silent travail, and there wonder over and ponder its mystery.

How often, at the cottage door in Nazareth, came a timid knock, and the pitiful accents of misery calling the Master's name? How many a hand was thrust into His and drew Him forth, even from the hearing of Mary, into the dread of night and the silence of the sleeping village? How many a choking voice lifted its burden to His attentive ear and stifled its sobs upon His breast, out there in the darkness where the shame and misery of the burning face were sheltered in merciful shadows and the mantle of His protecting love?

The purity and dignity of His presence, the inscrutable holiness of His bearing—did they check the wanton word and the headlong passions of men? Did he produce on them the same effect that His Eucharistic presence produces upon us as we enter in and draw near the Holy of Holies where He resides? The solemnity of God is upon us there, and we feel slipping from our soul the spirit of the world. About us is the peace of His repose, the security of His power, the bliss of His love. The complexities of life are resolved in the presence of the majestic simplicity of God.

For those who crossed His path in Nazareth, was there the indescribable atmosphere of spiritual charm, subtle and sweet like a breath of heaven? His words wrote themselves in the memory of men. Someone was soon to say: "Never did man speak like this Man."¹ And yet so brief was His discourse, so simple His speech, the children stopped to listen and hung upon the beauty of His words.

Yes, it was the children who called forth the love of Christ in its deepest sweetness. A little wounded cry wrung from a baby-breast sped like an arrow to the core

¹ John 7:46.

of His heart, and the divine hands let fall their most urgent work to gather into the comfort of His arms the tiny sufferer. He was a child again, with the woes of babyhood upon Him. His breast thrilled with the flutter of the wee heart against it; His eyes filled with tears at the little grief-drenched eyes; and He pressed the quivering lips and stilled them in the tenderness of His kiss. He was a child again, with the cold wind searching the cave of Bethlehem, and He felt again the pressure of His Mother's arms, closer, closer, with the pulsing of her heart and the warmth of her kisses and all the dear comfort of her breast. And the babe in His arms nestled closer, smiled and cooed and raised its dimpled fingers to the Saviour's face, and fell asleep in His embrace.

We sometimes wonder how Jesus looked upon the sin of Nazareth and passed it by and held His peace. What anguish must have wrung that divine heart; what an unendurable desire to stay the sinner, to right the wrong, to rescue the soul upon the brink of the abyss. Sin hurt Him with a pain that was physical as well as mental and spiritual. The great white purity and rectitude of His soul shrank from it with repulsion and the fire of His zeal blazed with a holy and consuming indignation. And yet, how accurately He drew the delicate and difficult line between the sinner and the sin. How profound was His hatred of the one, how abounding His love for the other.

When shall we strip our blinded eyes of passion and prejudice, and, in our relations with the sinner walk in the light of Christ's dear truth? Until we do so we shall never enter into His designs and the spirit of His ministry, with its surpassing love that suffered and for-

gave, and sought to reconcile all with the justice and mercy crowning it.

It hurts to think that there was sin in Nazareth—that stainless flower set among the hills of Galilee. And Christ's eyes watched it with the pain of a daily crucifixion. There are some sins we would hardly have dared to associate with Christ's mercy had He not bid us stoop with Him and rescue their victims in the very face of public hostility. We sometimes hold our breath at the fearless power of such charity.

What relief, then, to turn His steps homeward—to Mary's home, the stainless sanctuary in which His soul delights; to the utter purity and freedom and ideal love of Mary's presence. We fancy seeing an unconscious hastening of His step, a quickening of His breath, and an anticipation of irrepressible relief now struggling with the divine pity of His face. . . . He crosses the threshold and stands before her, and looks down into the calm purity of her eyes.

Something troubles Him. What mother's heart could not divine it? Mary rises. Tenderly she goes to Him (O, heavenly privilege of the Mother of Christ!) and lays her head upon His breast, and waits. . . . It is one of His adorable human moments when Christ gathers the weakness and dependence of mankind to Himself, and sanctifies them in His own human needs. There, in the perfect sympathy of Mary's love, He distils the honey and the myrrh that mingle in His heart. In the pure springs of her crystal soul Jesus steeps His pain and is refreshed.

It would seem that Christ waited for the full maturity of His physical powers, as these slowly ripened under the fostering care of Mary and through the experimental

knowledge He acquired, before entering upon His active mission, as though—how can we say it!—He would give us of His best.

It was as though He felt compelled to steep Himself deeper in all those qualities and circumstances and experiences which constitute human life; life in itself, and that to which it tends. He wished to walk the earth with human feet, to touch it with human hands, to look into men's eyes with human knowledge, to speak to our hearts with a voice whose music should ring with the fullest human chords, that He might re-establish for all time the ruptured concord between flesh and spirit.

Christ willed also, through those long thirty years—for this, too, accords with the human way of learning He assumed—to imbibe from Mary's perfect nature that potent charm which appealed so unfailingly to the hearts of the women of the Gospel, and whose sweetness steals to us across the ages with the freshness of immortality and as an inspiration all divine.

30

THE PARTING

IT WAS one of those perfect nights when the stars grew light in their watches "and rejoiced and shined forth to Him that made them." Mary's soul, more beautiful than they, burned like a white lamp in the presence of Jesus.

The time was not far distant when her Son was to enter upon His Public Ministry, and one thing He still wished to tell her before that moment came. Silently He drew her to His heart, as they stood beneath the open heavens, and revealed to her something of the mysteries of His Eternal Love for her.

With the plain of Jezreel below, and the quiet stars above, He told her how in "the womb of the eternal years" the thought of God conceived her as not yet in the flesh, how His Love delighted in her, how His Wisdom planned her free from every stain of sin, and how at last His will decreed the creation of her immaculate being, strong and delicate, and wrought throughout with the surpassing beauty of divine workmanship.

From eternity, the Uncreated Word rested with complacency in the divinely generated thought of her, and abode therein until time should bring the instant when He would take substance from her and dwell in the

pure temple of her stainless flesh. "Thou art all fair, O My love, and there is not a spot in thee!"¹

He told her how, from the topmost pinnacle of His eternal bliss, He had desired her, whom He loved above all creatures, that He might prepare within her breast that mystic nuptial chamber where the espousals of Divinity with humanity should take place—the union of the nature of God, represented in the Invisible Word, with the nature of man, represented by Mary, the Ever-Virgin Mother. And the heart of Mary thrilled at God's Love for men.

He told her how, when the fulness of time had come, He had set her among the sons of men, a lily among thorns. But His Spirit guarded her with the eye of "a jealous God." And He preserved untainted the fair unfolding of her soul. "Lest any hurt come of it, I keep it night and day."²

He told her how, with infinite tenderness, He had watched her little feet pace back and forth among the shadows of the Temple, His Presence closing ever more intimately about her life. Her ear was ravished by the mystic music of His voice; her soul was filled by an imminent sense of divine manifestation that haunted the silence of her heart. A luminous clarity of vision and a keen understanding of the words and ways of God possessed her mind. She became alert to the faintest whisper of His inspirations.

He told her how He had watched the first sweet dawn, in her childish soul, of that dominant desire of her race for the Messias that He might come to deliver it from its bonds. He saw, indeed, the sullen clouds of error and perversity which threatened to distort and to eclipse

¹ Cant. 4:7.

² Is. 27:3.

the truth of the Messianic prophecy. But her soul paid no heed to these and rose untroubled, in unsullied purity of faith, to the zenith of the Prophets' loftiest hopes. "For Sion's sake I will not hold my peace. . . . I will not rest till her Just One come forth as brightness, and her Saviour be lighted as a lamp."³

Least of all did she surmise that she herself would be the Mother of the King, although even then, unknown to her soul, He had crowned the courage of her victorious desires.

"He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation: and with the robe of justice He hath covered me, as a bridegroom decked with a crown, and as a bride adorned with her jewels."⁴

All this was true, and yet Mary in her humility thought only of the favor God would do her were she chosen for the handmaid of the favored one who should be Mother of the Messias King. He looked into her eyes and whispered: "Yet a little while, Beloved, and I am with thee." Mystic words whose import, even then, Mary could not comprehend.

Then He told her how He had watched her soul expand and reach out toward the extent of His all-engrossing love for men; how with the pain of it that soul waxed strong and faint by turns; how it wrought within itself a sanctuary for His promised Incarnation, and within her arms a refuge where His every woe and joy should fly in time to come.

Evermore, her beauty and her goodness grew, straight and fair, in the sight of Heaven, oblivious of the thorns which compassed her about. And the perfume of her virtues rose in mystic and piercing sweetness to the

³ Is. 62:1.

⁴ Ibid. 61:10.

Throne of the Most High and wrapped Him in its fragrance.

Her pleading soul looked up to Him and her prayers ascended from lips steeped in the balm of grace. The Divine Heart Itself melted with the fervor of her desires. The flame of her love made still more fair and delectable His purpose that was to answer to the universal need of men, until He was straitened beyond endurance for the Redemption which He was to accomplish, and He hastened with a yearning that was not to be denied. "The voice of my Beloved, behold He cometh leaping upon the mountains."⁵

He told her that never so holy a moment had rung through the choirs of Heaven as that of her silent victory over the Heart of God, when He came at her *Fiat* and yielded Himself captive to her love. "My Beloved to me and I to Him, who feedeth among the lilies."⁶

And He told her, in fine, of the graces He bestowed upon her during those nine long months of uninterrupted and exclusive possession, when hour by hour, through day and night, the ceaseless sanctities inundating His soul made music in her being and sanctified each pulse of her mothering life. "Full of grace," He had declared her through His angel, and therefore immaculate at His first coming to her. But her soul now was "like a watered garden and like a fountain of water whose waters shall not fail,"⁷ and through it all shone the glory of the Uncreated Light.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God . . . and the Word was made flesh."⁸

* * *

⁵ Cant. 2:8.

⁶ Ibid. 2:16.

⁷ Is. 58:11.

⁸ John 1:1, 14.

What He had come to accomplish was now nearing fulfilment: first His parting with Mary; then His public Ministry; and lastly, Calvary. Soon those Thirty Golden Years would end, which He had spent with Mary. But the faith, the confidence, the love, the complete self-oblation practised through all those years would never fail her now.

"Thou shalt be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God."⁹

* * *

November in Galilee. Even the flower of Netzer droops in its sheltered bed, and its sweet face grows pallid with snow-light from distant Libanus. The spice of the Cedar no longer journeys upon the wanton wind but lies in a frozen grip of ice. Jesus tells His Mother it is like the hearts of men which He must liberate from the chill of death by the warm breath of His consuming love. "Arise, O north wind, and come, O south wind, blow through my garden and let the aromatical spices thereof flow!"¹⁰

With that He turns His face and up to Him surge the voices of His beloved souls, far down in the arid places of the world. How can He defend Himself against that importunate cry? When was the heart of Jesus ever known to resist the plea of love or pain? Had He not clothed His Godhead in flesh, and wrought for His outraged justice the velvet mantle of mercy, that He might now abandon Himself to the will of our stricken souls and lay down His life at their behest?

Up to the somber hills He lifts His eyes. Their barren

⁹ Is. 62:3.

¹⁰ Cant. 4:16.

arms would seem to bar the far horizon of His Father's Kingdom, and, prison-like, to close about His straitened heart. Helplessly the white petals of the fair Flower of Galilee fall, like Mary's love, about the Saviour's feet; and from the hills of Juda floats a voice in the wilderness: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight His paths."¹¹

At hand is the day when the golden curtains of that Hidden Life must drop, when Christ must step forth into the outer darkness of suffering and death.

Great tragedies are appallingly simple, the simpler the more sublime. There was no preparation between Mother and Son save that long agony of their strong souls which had underlain every sweetness and joy of those Thirty Years, and had hymned its dirge into the very fiber of their hearts. . . .

"Mother, the hour is at hand!"

And Mary stood, the Queen of sorrows, shrined in the shadow of the cottage door, with the chill breath of the November morning piercing through to the desolation of her mother's heart.

Stars were fading over the crown of Tabor. Dawn haunted the shadows of the night. The white face of the Mother of God waned into the ethereal beauty of the morning. But as Jesus searched its speechless pain, the fire of His love struggled through the pallid mists, and burned like a veiled glory drifting athwart a sea of sorrow.

Then, across that golden bar came trooping a vast host, the shadows of the souls whom Jesus loved, and, numbers without number, they suppliantly crouched

¹¹ Matt. 3:3.

at the portal of Mary's heart. . . . Could she refuse them?

As the sun rose in all its splendor, Jesus smiled, and blessed her; and, blessing, turned His face unto the waiting world.

EPILOGUE

NEVER was the bond broken between Mary and her Son. Nothing, not even death, could effect their separation.

Absent though Jesus was, Mary "pondered" all His words with the luminous intelligence of her soul, and wrought them into her very being with the consuming fire of her virginal heart. Jesus lived in her and she in Him. Long before He had spoken that word to His disciples, "Abide in Me, and I in you,"¹ Mary had lived it in her life of everyday.

The human heart of Christ, in turn, found in the thought of Mary warmth and comfort for the cold and dullness of the great unfeeling world, as yet not penetrated by the grace of God.

Well Mary knew that the Jerusalem which of old had slain the prophets would now, in her stubborn pride and blindness, fill up the measure of her iniquity by persecuting her Messias. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem," Christ Himself was to exclaim, "thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wing; and thou wouldst not?"² And so Mary asked in her inmost thought: "How will it be with the world, O Lord?" And her foreboding heart replied:

¹ John 15:4.

² Matt. 23:37.

"If it reject Thee in the flesh, how shall it accept Thee in the spirit? The great, the sensual, the materialistic world! How shall its gross hands relinquish their earthly treasures to gather the spiritual riches of Thy precious word, lavished upon the stony highways of Thy royal city?"

Mary always would be nearest to the Heart of Jesus, and no son's loyalty to the woman who bore him should ever equal His. Nor are we to conclude that henceforth they were to meet no more on earth. It is not impossible, nor at all unlikely, that the footsteps of Jesus traced their way again along the winding paths that led to Mary's home, and that His hand once more lifted the worn familiar latch of her door.

The first miracle of Christ's public ministry took place in Mary's presence, and at her intercession, when otherwise His hour for manifestation to the world was yet to come. It was at the marriage feast at Cana in Galilee, when at her merest hint, water was made wine, "and His disciples believed in Him."

What catches the eye in the account by St. John, who obviously was present, is the little verse added at the end: "After this He went down to Capharnaum, *He and His mother, and His brethren, and His disciples: and they remained there not many days.*"⁸

What a new window it opens into the life of Jesus with Mary. How familiar it all sounds, and how blessed the words that must have passed between them, however few the days.

In years not far distant Mary was to possess Him once more, body and soul, humanity and Divinity, in the unsullied beauty of His Eucharistic being. Daily He

⁸ John 2:12.

would come to abide with her in that inner sanctuary, the chaste tabernacle of Mary's breast, where He might commune with her in accents of divine affection, and she in turn might freely pour out to Him all the love and tenderness of her own immaculate heart, imploring Him for aid in the needs of the world, for the conversion of sinners and the turning of souls to God.

From these Eucharistic trysts with Christ her spirit would draw strength to live on here below, mothering the souls of men, until clad in the robes of joy and jubilation she would at last be taken up to Heaven and crowned Queen of angels and saints. There, to the end of time, she continues to intercede for us and through her hands to disperse the graces won by Christ her Son, in whose sufferings she shared.

O Lady Mary, thy bright crown
Is no mere crown of majesty;
For with the reflex of His own
Resplendent thorns Christ circled thee.⁴

⁴ Francis Thompson.

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